
PART MAN,
PART MACHINE,
ALL COP.
DETROIT
POLICE
ROBOCOP
THE FUTURE OF LAW ENFORCEMENT
A Novel by Ed Naha
Based on the Screenplay by
Edward Neumeier & Michael Miner

ROBOCOP

Murphy was a good cop. He had the toughest beat in the toughest precinct in a tough city. He had a fine family, good friends, and a new partner. Then a bunch of lowlifes blew him away.

Only Murphy didn't completely die. He came back in a body of steel—big, invincible, and deadly . . . back to the streets where the bad guys ruled. But no more. Behind the badge is a cop that can't be killed. A super cop out to find the punks who shot him. And stop crime. Dead.

MUGGER : 0 ROBO : 1

The mugger held a knife to the girl's throat. He laughed, watching the shimmering tears cascade down her face. He blinked. Her tears weren't shimmering anymore. The moonlight illuminating her face had been blotted out by a large shadow.

An Olympian voice thundered across the alley. "Let the woman go! You're under arrest!" Walking down the alley was the biggest cop the creep had ever seen, and his hands were as big as . . . his gun. Which was real big.

Robo saw the time for talk was over. He switched from his Public Address mode to his Targeting sequence. He raised his gun. The mugger holding the girl ducked behind her. "I'll cut this bitch's neck from ear to ear," he shouted.

Calling up his targeting grids, Robo searched for a shot that would safely miss the woman. Swiveling his body, he fired a single round into the alley wall on the left. He heard the bullet ricochet to the right. Ping. Another ricochet downward. The hostage screamed as Robo's bullet angled into the back of her assailant's head, neatly blowing out his brains.

A **Jon Davison** PRODUCTION
OF A **Paul Verhoeven** FILM
Peter Weller • Nancy Allen

ROBOCOP

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ROBOCOP

Ed Naha



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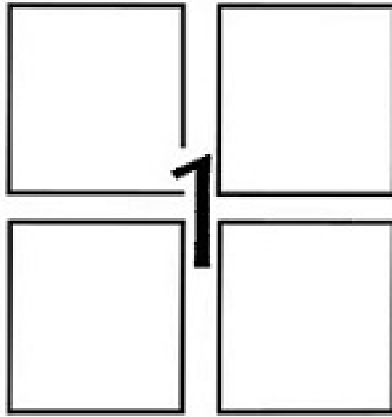
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For Kate and Kiah

PART



The superior man understands what is right;
the inferior man understands what will sell.

—Confucius (c. 551-479 B.C.)

[1]

He was a cop.

A good cop.

At least that's what Murphy told himself as he stared into the darkness outside his small, prefab home. From this distance the deserted streets seemed safe. But Murphy knew better. Beneath the silence, behind the shadows, things were ready to explode. Still, he had accepted the transfer. Like a good cop.

He suddenly remembered his father. Instinctively, he took a step back from the window. His father had been killed that way. Looking out a window. Hit by a stray bullet. Back when Detroit got its first taste of the Troubles.

Maybe twenty years ago when the feds had cut off loans and were urging cities to fend for themselves. The problem was that most of the major cities were strapped tighter than a snare drum. Detroit, like several other big cities, snapped.

Social programs were whittled to nothing. The poor didn't understand that. They took to the streets to vent their anger. His family had lived in what was known as Old Detroit back then. There still had been families there, people who had clung all their lives to hopes and dreams. Murphy's father had just been in the wrong place at the wrong time. Sniper. Bang. Hiss. The tinkling of shattered glass. That was the end of James Patrick Murphy.

Dying, his father seemed almost amazed and amused by it all. He had moved to Detroit to make a fortune working in the auto plants. Then, the auto industry went under and the elder Murphy wound up working for the new company in town. OmniCon. Grunt work. But the insurance had paid for the funeral. Nice, ornate coffin. Prerequisite flowers with the Xeroxed signatures of faceless executives. His father had looked up into his startled son's eyes and whispered: "Sumbitch." He had shrugged, smiled, and died.

Murphy sighed. OmniConsumer Products had turned out to be the city's savior of sorts. New housing projects. New jobs. When the city found itself bankrupt, unable to pay even the police less than a year ago, the OmniCon team marched in and simply took over the struggling city services. They now paid the police. And the fire department. And the sanitation crews. And the park commission. Hell, at least they paid you on time.

Murphy heard gunshots behind him. Instinctively, he whirled around. Spotting the source, he relaxed. Ten-year-old Jimmy Murphy was sprawled in front of the TV watching his favorite show, *T. J. Lazer*. Murphy tried not to smirk as the cop on the tube gunned down a half-dozen Cro-Magnon thugs, twirled his guns, and replaced them in his holster. Lazer, with his slight pot belly and badly designed toupee, would have been dead meat in the Old Detroit sector in five seconds.

The sector where Murphy was heading tomorrow.

Homecoming.

Murphy felt his stomach tighten slightly. He was tense, but he'd be damned if he'd show it in front of his family. It was bad enough he brought the nightmares home with him: the images of the screaming faces, the battered autos, the endless streams of blood and tears. He wasn't going to show weakness or worry in front of the kid and Jan.

He glanced at the window and saw his own reflection in the fluctuating light of the TV. He jumped. For a second, the face he saw was that of his father. Yeah. He had the same high cheekbones. The same deep-set blue eyes. The thin lips, eager to smile but not quite knowing how to relax that much. He forced himself to laugh at his own uneasiness. Thirty-five years old and he was turning into a gigantic wiener. He nearly laughed out loud. Welcome to the world of wienerdom, Murphy.

Jan walked into the room. "Dinner will be ready in a minute." Their eyes met. She knew how jumpy he felt. They'd been together too long for her not to know. They'd grown up together and had developed a friendship that blossomed into love. He forced himself to smile widely and, for Jimmy's benefit mostly, he rubbed a callused hand across his tight stomach and announced, "Great, Mom. I could eat a horse."

Jan forced a smile in return. "We had that last night. Will pot roast do?"

Murphy nodded. "I suppose I can force myself."

In front of the television, Jimmy laughed. "I can if Dad can."

Jan walked out toward the kitchen. "A couple of wiseguys."

Murphy watched Jimmy settle back in front of the TV. His gaze, once again, wandered to the street. He wondered what would go down out there tonight. And what he'd find there tomorrow.

[2]

A full moon shone down on Old Detroit, giving it a dead, eerie glow. Four monolithic skyscrapers towered above the twisted shadows of the street level: the future gazing down with disdain upon the last crumbling remnants of the past. Three A.M. Most of the city was long asleep, but in Old Detroit, there was a feral street life at all hours.

Patrolmen Frederickson and Connors guided their TurboCruiser down a deserted street. Two blocks ahead of them, another patrol car hummed. Frederickson and Connors were watching the back door tonight. They didn't mind. It was monotonous work but, in this sector, monotony was welcome.

They watched the stubby police car ahead of them disappear down an alley. The cars weren't much to look at but they kicked the hell out of the streets, their twin turbine engines sounding like banshees screaming when they were revved.

The two cops allowed themselves to be lulled into a sense of security. Above them, roof-mounted spotlights casually reflected off the buildings and the badly maintained storefronts. A garish, tattered billboard caught Frederickson's eye. B.B. TEX—CREDIT ON 20-YEAR FAMILY CONTRACTS. MoonCorp had promised a lot to get people to colonize the moon back then. Now, even space travel was old hat. There was a waiting list of people ready to leave the ramshackle cities for the promise of something better somewhere, *any*where.

Frederickson glanced at the computerized dash of the cruiser as he drove. Readouts. More readouts. He twisted his body in the seat in a vain effort to get comfortable. Half of the hardship that came with police work these days arose from the uniform—which was a literal pain in the ass. Padded bodysuits, high-impact plastic armor, sleek but cumbersome helmets. He tried to find a position that would put a little less pressure on his already strung-out bladder. Fat chance. He sank in his seat and accepted the discomfort with a stoic's sigh.

Frederickson and Connors took a corner easy. The lead car was once again in view. Far ahead of the first auto, a shadow-shape glided across the street. Frederickson tensed. Gut reaction. He wondered whether Alcott and Duffy, in the point car, caught it.

His radio squawked to life. Someone at the ComLink dispatch center had spotted the blip on the radar as well. "Got a rabbit running East on Hoover. Check it out."

The lead car sputtered a reply: “Roger, chickenshit, sir, over.” A laugh. That would be Alcott. He worked very hard at taking very little seriously. “Relax, pal, we got you on the grid.”

Frederickson relaxed somewhat. The runner ahead of the lead car was beeping steadily on the computerized map of the area. The lead car increased its speed and pulled around the corner out of sight. A glowing red ball on the dashboard grid in the second car indicated the lead’s position. From the map, Frederickson could see that the point cruiser was getting nearer to its prey.

Just routine stuff. Wino most likely. Still, the guy was pretty lively for a wino.

Frederickson leaned into his ComLink mike. “See anything, Alcott?”

From the point car came Alcott’s voice, very matter-of-fact. “Looks like a woman.”

Connors, staring ahead, flashed Frederickson a bemused look. They heard laughter from the first car.

“Jesus, pinch me, Duffy,” Alcott exclaimed. “Am I crazy or is she stark raving naked?”

Duffy feigned shock. “She’s holding a sign. It says FREE BLOW JOBS.”

Frederickson and Connors smirked at each other. Alcott’s voice boomed over the radio. “Oh, my God! Frederickson. It’s . . . it’s *your wife!!!”*

Frederickson eased off on the gas. Wiseasses, he thought. He could hear Alcott and Duffy laughing hysterically over the ComLink. A stifled noise emerged from his right. Abruptly, the laughter from the first car stopped. Frederickson turned to find Connors holding in his laughter, badly. A hoarse cry blurted forth from the radio. Connors bent forward toward the ComLink. Nothing but static.

Frederickson glanced at the computerized dash grid. The red dot that had been the lead TurboCruiser burst suddenly, covering the screen with red light. “Shit,” Connors muttered.

Frederickson stood on the gas. The TurboCruiser lurched forward, screeching around a corner, lights flashing and siren wailing. The car spun around a corner. Frederickson gritted his teeth. He was tired of this war on the streets routine.

He slammed on the brakes and gaped at the street before him. Connors unsnapped his riot gun without thinking, trying to control the nausea bubbling within him.

Not ten feet before them was the twisted, burning remains of the point car. The armored bodies of Duffy and Alcott were sprawled on the street, their limbs positioned awkwardly, like discarded rag dolls. An ominous cloud of black, putrid smoke erupted from the shattered

engine of the police cruiser.

Frederickson fought to keep control. He barked into the ComLink, "Officers down. Unit 217 requisition backup and MediVac."

The reply, which came in a hail of static, was short and to the point. "Unit 217. All available units presently engaged. Proceed as primary contact unit. MediVac request acknowledged."

Connors pounded his fist on the dash. "Great. John Wayne time."

He eased the passenger door open. "Come on. I'll cover you."

Frederickson and Connors slowly opened the doors to the TurboCruiser. Whoever blew up the car in front of them was a hardcore nutcase. Whoever it was was probably still out there. Watching them now.

Connors stood before his car, turning in slow circles. The bayonet-mounted flashlight on his riot gun sent a small circle of light playing across the boarded-up windows and jagged rooftops of the street. While Connors cased the area, Frederickson approached the burning cruiser, his visor down.

He gazed into the cracked visor of Duffy. Beneath the Plexiglas was a mangled face. Stephanie Duffy, aged twenty-eight, on the force four years. No signs of life.

Connors, still twirling slowly, glanced at Frederickson. "How's Duffy?"

Frederickson was already moving toward Alcott. "She's dead," he said, bending over the second fallen patrolman. Alcott was still alive. Barely. His body was beginning to writhe and shake uncontrollably. Convulsive shock. Massive chest wound. Christ. Through the smashed armor breastplate, he could see Alcott's heart! Frederickson felt the tears well up in his eyes. This made no sense. Why these two? Why on a routine patrol? He froze over the body, his anger building. Connors still twirled.

Connors moved the flashlight over the same spots over and over again. There was no one out there, right? Then why was he so nervous? "Come on, man. Let's get the hell out of here."

A faint click caused Connors to whirl toward the right side. He leveled his riot gun, ever ready. He made a mental note to yell to Frederickson. It was his last real thought. He felt a brief instant of surprise as a five-shotgun barrage of 00 buckshot blew his chestplate into a dozen pieces. His fading consciousness watched his hands drop the riot gun to the ground. It was covered with blood. His blood.

The roar of the shotguns was brief and deadly. Frederickson, seeing Connors buy it, made a run for the car, his own riot gun blazing. He couldn't see anyone out there, damn it. It was just too goddamned

dark. He fired over and over again into the surrounding night. With a little luck he'd make it. No luck was forthcoming. A faint burst of light flickered from the shadows. A two-inch section of his left leg blew into space, a large crimson tear bursting from his pants. He hobbled onward toward the awaiting TurboCruiser. It seemed miles away.

He could see the gunmen advancing now. They didn't seem human, at first, just dark blobs running forward. Frederickson dove toward the open driver's side of his TurboCruiser. Bullets hissed in the air above him as he scrambled behind the wheel. "Pleasegodplease," he muttered, slamming the door and firing up the twin turbines. The car roared to life. The monitors and readouts on the dash lit up suddenly. He pulled his body into sitting position, slammed the car into drive and gaped out at the street as the windshield before him exploded with a roar.

Frederickson felt his head snap back into the seat, his visor cracked. His face was hot. Sticky. His consciousness was swimming. Everything seemed louder than usual. Everything was clearer. Everything was ultra.

The figures emerged from the shadows. Frederickson almost laughed. They were men. Ordinary men. Not demons. Not monsters. Just guys. Streetscum. He watched a short, rodentlike man dash by a brick wall, illuminated by the moonlight. The man cackled slightly as he produced a paint can and watched the first TurboCruiser smolder.

A second, gangly man strolled up to Alcott's quivering body, pulled out a handgun and sent a bullet speeding through the dying cop's brain. The quivering stopped.

A tall man with a high forehead and a stately gait nodded approval at the remains of Connors and Alcott. He adjusted his sunglasses slightly and walked toward Frederickson. Frederickson choked back a laugh. He never could understand why people wore sunglasses at night.

The gangleader opened the door next to Frederickson and smiled. "How ya feeling?"

Frederickson opened his mouth to reply. Blood, but no sound, emerged from his lips. The gangleader grinned amiably. "Go back and give your cop friends a message: Stay out of Old Detroit."

The man leaned in further and pointed the muzzle of his autoload shotgun in Frederickson's direction. Frederickson tensed. The muzzle of the gun meandered past Frederickson's body and prodded the stickshift. Click. Click. The car screamed into reverse, slamming the driver's door as it did so. Frederickson grappled with the steering wheel, struggling to maintain control. He gazed through the shattered windshield, watching the scene before him drift back into the

darkness.

He saw the gangleader shoulder his autoload and the little idiot with the paint can move over the bodies of the three dead cops. The geek sprayed three large numbers on their battered torsos: . . . 29 . . . 30 . . . 31.

Four other men emerged from the shadows; a black, an Asian, a barrel-chested thug and a tall, clean-cut type. The big man picked up Connors's riot gun and tossed it to the clean-cut boy. The black man smiled at the flaming wreckage while the Asian lit a cigarette. For them, this was just another run-of-the-mill night.

Frederickson's car backed up wildly into the streets where, moments before, the surviving cop had shared a joke with Connors, Alcott, and Duffy. Dribbling blood as he coughed, Frederickson extended a shaking hand toward the gearshift. He slowly inched the car into drive and zigzagged down the road.

Frederickson spat the blood out of his mouth and leaned toward the ComLink. "Officer needs assistance," he wheezed. "Sector GK2. Officer needs assistance in Old Detroit."

His own words thundered through his brain. Every nerve ending in his body seemed to be exploding. "Aw, Jesus," he blurted. "I'm fucked up."

The car lurched down the street. Frederickson slid into darkness. He didn't feel the impact when the TurboCruiser rumbled, straight-on, into a heap of dented garbage cans.

[3]

Murphy sat sipping coffee as Jimmy bounded through the house, on his way back to school after lunch. Jan silently stood at the sink, mechanically going through the motions as Murphy watched the mini-TV drone on. If he had any sense, he would have been watching cartoons. Maybe reruns of “Gumby” or something. But he was a news junkie. He couldn’t get enough information. Now, he was about to get too much.

On the screen, two TV news commentators made a determined effort to show the world who had the most and brightest teeth. Jess Perkins, a bubble-headed blonde who wore her blouses tight, seemed to be in the lead, although co-anchor Casey Wong, a crew-cutted Eurasian, should have gotten some award just for the width of his smile.

Casey was doing the talking now. “Today’s top stories. Pretoria. The threat of nuclear confrontation in South Africa escalated today when the white military government of that besieged city-state unveiled a French-made neutron bomb and affirmed its willingness to use the three-megaton device as the city’s last line of defense.”

“Nice,” Murphy muttered, tossing some extra sugar into his coffee. He had a feeling he’d need every ounce of energy he could muster today. His tour of duty ran from the afternoon until after dark.

The TV flickered as a videotape of an angry man running a gantlet of reporters in front of Detroit’s City Hall appeared.

“Locally,” perky Jess injected, “Ron Miller called it quits today, relinquishing his City Council seat after being denied a recount in one of the closest elections in this city’s history.”

The videotape ended and Murphy found himself staring at the face of Casey Wong. Behind him was superimposed a graphic. The body of a police officer with a red “X” slashed over it was drawn in a clever, clean, and very commercial manner. It was the type of illustration you saw on a cornflakes box.

Murphy felt his chest tighten. He was half-expecting this. “The police death toll in Old Detroit rose to thirty-one today when three officers were killed and one was critically injured in an exchange of gunfire just before dawn.”

Murphy heard a dish shatter in the sink behind him. Perky Jess appeared with a human interest story about three Moon Dome Kids

making rock and roll in space.

The news show lurched into a series of commercials. A big-busted woman caressed a TurboSedan while singers intoned “Big Is Back.” A smarmy doctor stressed the convenience of his one-stop clinic for big operations. “We have a complete line of Jarvics and limited supplies of the new Jenson SportsHart. Three-year warranty, complete financing, qualifies for a health tax credit.”

Murphy sat there sweating. He could feel Jan standing behind him, gazing at the nape of his neck. Neither one would speak. It was just as well. Anything either one of them said would only make the moment worse.

Wong appeared on the screen, continuing the big local story of the day. “Three dead police officers in Old Detroit, one critically injured. Police Union leaders blame OmniConsumer Products, the firm which recently entered into a contract with the city to fund and run the Detroit Metropolitan Police Department. They claim that, since OmniCon has entered the police business, safety procedures have become lax and most precincts are understaffed. Furthermore, they insist that the investigation into the killings in the Old Detroit sector has been sorely undermanned. Dick Jones, Division President of OmniCon, had this response.”

The thin, angular face of career executive Jones, filled the screen. “None of the allegations are true. OmniCon is doing its best to run the police force efficiently and smoothly. Every available man is working on the investigation concerning these all too frequent tragedies. The Police Union, apparently, would like the public to forget one very simple fact. Every policeman knows the risks he faces in the field. Ask a cop and he’ll tell you, ‘If you can’t stand the heat, better get out of the kitchen.’ ”

Murphy smirked silently to himself. Jones’s idea of risk was probably ordering his happy-hour drink without ice.

Jan slammed a coffee cup down in the sink and rushed out of the room, holding back the tears. Murphy turned off the television and sat, silently, staring at the idiotic patterns on the Formica table top before him. Who the hell designed these tables anyhow, the Lighthouse Institute?

He sighed and got to his feet. No sense trying to calm Jan down right now. She was too upset for talk. He headed for the front door. He’d call her later and try to discuss her feelings logically. He hoped that, by dinnertime, he could think of a few logical things to tell her.

Right now, nothing in his life was making too much sense.

Right now, he was heading into Old Detroit.

[4]

The Old Detroit station looked more like an armed camp than a precinct house. Bullet holes pockmarked the outside of the brick building. Most of the Police TurboCruisers lined up in the street outside boasted dozens of dents and scratches. Murphy pulled his gas-guzzling station wagon into the parking lot next door, grabbed his athletic bag and headed for the front entrance.

A Prisoner Transport Vehicle pulled up and disgorged a half-dozen lowlifes who looked like walking threats to Darwin's theory of evolution.

Murphy took his encoded police badge and slid it into the slot next to the front door. The slot buzzed, spat the badge back out, and unlocked the metal portal.

Murphy stepped inside. The interior of the precinct house made the Black Hole of Calcutta seem cheerful. Cops, saddled with prisoners who all seemed to be wearing fly strips, wandered in and out of booking stations. A cop in his fifties and built like a bull, Sergeant Reed, presided over the insanity like a benign Viking. Spotting Murphy, Reed left his elevated desk and walked toward him. Before he got two feet forward, a weasel of a man in a shiny suit attached himself to Reed's side.

"About my client. Attempted murder is ridiculous. It's not like he killed someone or anything like that. This is clearly a violation of my client's civil rights, I bet."

Reed smiled sweetly at the man, only his reddened face revealing his true emotions. "Listen, pal. Between you and me? Your client's a scumbag. You're a scumbag. And we have a rule here. Scumbags talk to the judge on Monday morning. Now get out of my police station. Your client will still be here when you get back."

The lawyer smiled weakly and shuffled away. Murphy was forced to laugh. Reed motioned Murphy over to his desk.

Murphy reached into his athletic bag and pulled out a sheaf of useless paper. He handed it to Reed. "I'm Murphy. Transferring from Metro South."

Reed nodded, placing the papers on top of a stack of other useless forms. "Nice precinct. I understand they have croissant dispensers in the locker room. But we work for a living down here, Murphy. Get your armor and suit up."

"Yessir." Murphy turned to leave. "I appreciate the kind words."

Reed grabbed his elbow. "Oh, and Murphy?"

"Yessir?"

"Have a nice day."

Murphy smirked and headed toward the back of the station. He passed through two large metal doors. One of the doors had an old eight-by-ten photo of Rod Serling taped to it with the inscription *Welcome to the Twilight Zone* scrawled across the surface.

Murphy chuckled. Abandon all sense ye who enter here.

Murphy wandered down an aisle, past both policemen and policewomen donning their armor. "I'm Murphy," he said to one cop.

"I'm busy," the cop responded.

"I'm looking for my locker."

The cop reached over and pulled a name tag inscribed *Duffy* off the door to his left. "Take this one. No one is using it at the moment."

Murphy tossed his athletic bag into the locker. Behind him, three wall-mounted TV monitors relayed information culled from all sectors of the city. A steady hum of data filled the air. Murphy sat down on the wooden bench behind him. The bench nearly crumpled under his weight.

"We don't sit on those much," the cop to his left said. "Hazardous to your health."

Murphy slowly donned his armor, listening to three cops mutter from nearby.

"Any word about Frederickson?"

"They're still listing him as critical."

"His wife must be going out of her mind."

Murphy adjusted the padding on his bodysuit. He pulled the sleeves tightly. On each sleeve was a patch. One patch read DPD, Detroit Police Department. The other patch red: OCP. OmniConsumer Products. Murphy stared at the OCP patch, as if noticing it for the first time. It certainly was reassuring to be considered a *thing* by someone in a glass tower.

The cop on his left noticed Murphy's glazed expression and smiled. "So, what brings you to this little paradise?"

Murphy shrugged. "Transfer. OCP's restructuring the department."

"The name's Manson," the cop said.

"Murphy."

A second cop walked up. The name Starkweather was emblazoned over his front pocket. "Restructuring, huh? OmniCon. Bunch of morons. They're gonna manage this department right into the

ground."

"They cut ten guys loose over on the East Side," a cop named Ramirez said. "Just let them go. Said the precinct was overstaffed. Overstaffed my ass. We could use tanks down here."

"And try to get backup when you're in a jam." Starkweather smirked.

Manson snorted. "Try to find a MediVac after you've been jammed. Frederickson was out for almost an hour before anyone bothered to show up. The sonofabitch is lucky he had any blood left in his body by the time the OmniCon assholes arrived."

Murphy cinched his shoes. The room fell quiet. Murphy looked up as Reed, his jaw tight, and carrying an empty cardboard box marked *Cheerios* walked up to a locker bearing Frederickson's nameplate. He stared at the nameplate and slowly began emptying the contents of the locker into the box.

All eyes were on Reed. All eyes but for Starkweather's, his back toward the sergeant. Starkweather continued his harangue. "I tell you what we should do to those OmniCon assholes. We should strike. Fuck them and their high-tech paychecks."

Murphy flashed Starkweather a "not now" look. Starkweather turned slowly, in time to see Reed remove a picture of Frederickson's family and place it in the box. The sergeant slid the nameplate off the door and placed it on top of Frederickson's personal belongings. When he turned and faced his men, he seemed a good ten years older than he had only moments before.

"The funeral will be tomorrow," he said in a monotone. "The department asks all officers not on duty to attend. Donations for Frederickson's family may be given to Cecil . . . as usual."

The cops in the room stared angrily at the floor. Reed picked up the box and walked toward the exit, stopping, momentarily, before Starkweather. "And I don't want to hear any more of this strike shit. We're not plumbers. We're police officers. And police officers don't strike."

Reed marched to the door. He turned, one last time. "Murphy. Front and center."

Murphy holstered his 9-mm Mateba service revolver, grabbed his helmet and slammed his locker door shut. He placed a reassuring hand on Starkweather's shoulder. "Don't worry about it. The whole department is screwed up right now."

"Yeah, right."

Murphy stepped back into the main precinct room. He strained his eyes to spot Reed. The sergeant wasn't at his desk. Murphy watched

amazed as a suspect, a man with the build and temper of a wounded rhino, suddenly reared up from his chair during an interrogation and, hands manacled, ran head first for the front door. A small, visored cop, barely tall enough to come up to the man's elbow, leapt high into the air and kicked the crazy in the groin.

The manacled giant swung his tethered fists in the cop's direction. The little cop, caught off guard, tumbled down onto the ground with a sickening thud. Grabbing a nightstick, the cop lunged for the big man and, in a series of surprisingly quick moves, beat the giant's head bloody.

Reed walked up to Murphy's side and yelled in the direction of the fracas, "Hey, Lewis, when you're done fucking with your suspect, come over here."

The cop named Lewis slammed the giant in the head one final time. The prisoner collapsed onto the floor, taking three chairs with him. Lewis strolled over toward Murphy as Reed returned to his elevated desk and chair.

"Lewis," Reed said. "This guy's gonna be your new partner."

The smaller cop nodded. Reed looked at Murphy. "Murphy, this is Lewis. Lewis'll show you the neighborhood."

Murphy extended a hand. Lewis pulled the visor off her head, shaking loose a wave of cascading strawberry-colored hair. Murphy tried to hide his astonishment. Lewis grabbed Murphy's hand and pumped it as if she expected him to produce butter.

"Glad to know you, Murphy." She smiled sweetly.

Murphy pulled his hand back. It was red from her grip. "This way," she said, walking toward a side door.

Murphy shook his head, confused, and followed. Reed sat at his desk, chuckling. "I give you my blessings," he intoned. "You make such a lovely couple." It was a dumb joke, but the cops closest to the booking desk laughed anyway. They'd take whatever humor they could whenever they could find it.

Murphy and Lewis walked into the parking garage. The place reeked of gasoline and carbon monoxide fumes as dozens of cops piled into their TurboCruisers and gunned them, preparing for afternoon patrol. Lewis, popping gum, led Murphy up to a patrol unit.

"Pretty slick, huh?" Lewis said, proudly. "Had body work on it last week. Sanded the bullet holes clean."

Murphy nodded. "Pretty slick," he agreed.

Lewis walked over to the driver's side of the car and yanked open the door. "I'd better drive until you know your way around."

Murphy slid by her into the driver's seat. "I always drive when I'm

breaking in a new partner."

He closed the door, leaving Lewis popping gum furiously outside. Murphy fired up the engine while Lewis walked around the car and climbed into the passenger side.

"Do you guys get to drive these things in Metro South or do you have chauffeurs?" she sneered.

By way of response, Murphy slammed down on the gas, sending the TurboCruiser fishtailing along the offramp of the parking garage. At the street exit of the garage, two police cars stood, idling, the cops inside comparing horror stories of their night shift duty. Murphy grinned evilly, and sent the TurboCruiser slicing between the two cars, missing them by inches. The car zoomed up onto the street and barreled off in a northerly direction.

Lewis blew a large bubble and popped it. "Not bad," she said, "for a new kid."

The car skidded down a side street, the gleaming skyline of the refurbished sectors of Detroit shining in the noonday sun behind. Lewis pointed to the metropolis in the rearview mirror as their car plunged into the slums of Old Detroit.

"Say good-bye to civilization, Murphy," Lewis said.

Murphy glanced in the rearview mirror, the OmniCon tower, rising 151 glass and steel stories above the city, shone brightly. "I'm not sure I call that civilization," Murphy muttered.

"You learn quick." Lewis smiled.

[5]

Morton and Johnson stepped into the OCP elevator and stared placidly through the glass as Kinney ran for the door. Morton, a thin, hyper junior executive was even tenser than usual. Today's meeting would be an important one at OmniCon. He was sure of that. Why, the Old Man himself would be in attendance.

If Johnson was nervous, his expression didn't betray the fact. One of the few black executives in the company, he was an OmniCon lifer. He knew better than to get the jitters every time the Old Man snapped his fingers. The Corporation moved constantly forward, that was true, but with the casual, lumbering pace of a brontosaurus. Very seldom did things dramatically change during the course of a single morning.

Kinney leaped into the elevator, almost getting caught in the door. Johnson sighed. Kinney was a new fish, eager to please. His genial, puppy-dog attitude produced a feeling deep within Johnson that bordered on nausea.

Kinney watched the doors close with a snap and laughed. "Wow! The Old Man is really going to be there? Gee. Why, would they invite us if he's going to be there?"

Johnson delivered his reply in cautious, even tones. "All the division heads are bringing their support teams. It's big. I figure they're greenlighting Delta City."

Morton didn't like that. He ran his fingers through his slicked-back hair, producing a residue of styling mousse on his knuckles. "Are you kidding? They never do anything ahead of schedule," he groused. "It's Jones. I bet it's Jones. He's got the 209 series going and he wants to show off."

Johnson smiled at the nervous executive. "Tough break, Morton."

Kinney stared, stupefied, at both men. He had no idea what they were talking about.

The elevator door slid open and Morton, Johnson, and Kinney joined a gaggle of other OmniCon executives in the hallway. The herd of employees wandered down a large corridor, surrounded by a dozen video monitors which broadcast pictures of the various worlds of OmniConsumer Products. Johnson didn't bother to even glance at the screens. He wasn't impressed. He'd been a company man too long. He passed the screens flashing the latest advancements in Travel Concepts, Community Concepts, Entertainment Concepts, Security

Concepts, ad infinitum.

Kinney dogged Johnson's heels. "I don't get it? Why is Morton so . . . *bummed?"*

Johnson sighed, watching Morton march down the hall, his hands jammed deep in his pockets. "When the ED 209 security project ran into serious delays and cost overruns, the Old Man ordered a backup plan—probably just to light a fire under Jones's ass. Morton there got the assignment but nobody in Security Concepts took it seriously. Unfortunately, Morton did."

Morton, overhearing, spun around. "My plan is better than Jones's. I'd go straight to the Old Man if I could."

Johnson offered a piece of sage advice. "Don't mess with Jones, man. He'll make sushi out of you."

Kinney nodded his head, getting into the spirit of things. "Yeah, I hear Jones is a real barracuda."

"Who asked you, twerp," Morton snapped.

Johnson placed a gentle arm on Morton's elbow. "Ease off."

The mob of executives made their way to two massive golden doors which led into the OmniCon boardroom. Johnson, Morton, and Kinney took seats alongside the wall. The aircraft carrier-sized boardroom table was reserved for the Big Boys.

"Look at that!" Kinney exclaimed.

Placed in the center of the table was a massive model of a super-modern city: a cornucopia of bridges, spires, and gardens. "It looks like paradise," Kinney exclaimed.

"Paradise with a price tag," Johnson added.

The OmniCon board members took their places at the table while, at its head, a distinguished white-haired gentleman and a red-faced, angular executive exchanged words. The Old Man didn't seem to be buying what Dick Jones, one of his key men, was saying. Jones was fighting to stay in control. He was known to have fits of anger that earned him the nickname of Mr. Punch in OmniCon circles; not only because he was prone to put his fists through things at key moments but because his verbal delivery and tall, lanky form made him resemble the masculine half of the classic Punch and Judy school of drama whenever he freaked out. Which was often.

Jones lowered his voice to a near whisper, causing the Old Man to lean forward more. The Old Man nodded his head. "What about this police thing? What seems to be the problem?"

"The Union's been bitching since we took over," Jones explained. "Now they have a media issue and they're throwing their weight around. It's the usual nonsense. We'll turn things around in the second

phase of our takeover. I promise."

The Old Man forced himself to smile. "Very good."

He turned from Jones. Dismissed, Jones sat at the left of the Old Man. The Old Man sat down and faced his executives. "All right. Let's get started. As you all know, I've had a dream for more than a decade now. I've asked you all to share it with me. In six months, we begin construction of Delta City, a new community to be erected where Old Detroit now stands."

All eyes in the room turned toward the spectacular model on the table. The Old Man focused his eyes on its gleaming spires. "Old Detroit has a cancer that threatens the entire city. The cancer is crime. And it must be cut out before we employ the two million workers that will breathe life into this city again. We have to be able to guarantee their safety before any labor unions will agree to enter the area."

The Old Man paused for effect. The board members were visibly moved. "Although shifts in the tax structure have created an economy ideal for corporate growth, community services, in this case Law Enforcement, have suffered. Frankly, the police are having a hard time in Old Detroit. I think it's about time that we gave them a helping hand. The sooner they take Old Detroit out of the headlines, the faster we can build."

The Old Man turned to Jones. "Dick? Will you fill them in, please?"

Jones stood as the lights in the room went down. Morton sat sullenly next to Johnson. "Dick. A swell name for a swell guy."

Johnson elbowed him into silence.

A panel above Jones's head slid open, revealing a series of monitors. The monitors began flashing numbers on the screen. Jones smiled at the gathering.

"Take a close look at the track record of this company," he grinned, "and you'll see that we have gambled in markets traditionally regarded as 'non-profit': hospitals, prisons, space colonies.

"I say that good business is where you find it! As you know, we've entered into a contract with the city to run local law enforcement. But at Security Concepts, we believe an efficient police force is only *part* of the solution to the ongoing problem of urban crime."

Morton eyed the faces of the board members. Damn it. Jones was winning them over. Jones realized this, as well, and turned on the charisma. "We need something more than traditional law enforcement, gentlemen. We need a twenty-four-hour-a-day police officer. A cop who doesn't need to eat or sleep. A cop with superior firepower and the reflexes to use it."

Jones walked over to the two golden doors in the conference room,

pausing dramatically before them. “Lights, please.”

The room lights brightened, reflecting in Jones’s enlarged eyes. “Fellow executives, I’m proud to introduce the future of law enforcement . . . ED 209.”

Jones opened the doors dramatically, revealing the presence of a seven-foot-tall robot. The robot was a hunchbacked killing machine, its rounded torso bent backward on two powerful legs. On each side of the torso were bulky “arms,” with ominous 20-millimeter cannon muzzles located below the wrist. Jones returned to the head of the table as the robot shambled into the boardroom, its elephantine feet producing large “kaa-thumps” as they struck the carpeted floor.

The OmniCon members in the boardroom let out a collective “oooh,” as ED 209 took its place next to the table. Johnson turned to Morton. Morton glared at the robotic cop. “Looks like a goddamned Tinkertoy,” he muttered.

Kinney was all smiles. “I don’t know,” he offered. “I think it’s kind of . . . *neat.”*

Morton glared at the kid. “Where did you pick up such technical terms?”

A rotund, mousy man in a white lab coat and several overall-encased technicians scurried into the room after ED 209. The technicians wheeled in a control panel mounted on a cart. Jones beamed, gazing into the faces of the OmniCon crème de la crème.

“The Enforcement Droid, Series 209, is a self-sufficient urban law enforcement robot,” he said cheerfully. “209 is currently programmed for urban pacification, but that’s only the beginning. After a successful tour of duty in Old Detroit, and a great deal of positive publicity, we can expect 209 to become the hot military product for the next decade.”

Jones puffed out his sunken chest. “Imagine, gentlemen. A global army consisting entirely of Droids. Twenty-four-hour-a-day combatants that will save human lives by fighting wars in lieu of flesh and blood soldiers. Combatants manufactured en masse by OmniCon.”

The board members nearly broke into a round of applause on that line. Jones flashed a grin at the Old Man. The Old Man was smiling himself. Visions of dollar signs were practically dancing over the heads of the assembled.

Jones turned to the mousy scientist. “Dr. MacNamara?”

MacNamara turned to his technicians. The small enclave huddled over the control panel. MacNamara fiddled with the robot controls for a moment before stepping away from the cart. He turned to face the mighty Droid as one of the technicians twirled a dial.

Immediately, ED 209's arms lurched to life. They flexed in the air in a mock body-builder stance. There were grins around the table. MacNamara, chuckling like a kid with a new Christmas present, faced the assembled. "Now, we'll need an arrest subject for this little demonstration," he said cheerfully.

Jones scanned the room. "Mr. Kinney? Would you come up here and give us a hand?"

Morton scowled as Kinney leaped to his feet and bounded toward the robot, a kinetic portrait of unchecked enthusiasm. "Yes, sir. Be happy to, sir. Okeydokey."

Jones reached down to the floor next to the table and produced a sleek black case. Opening it, he pulled out a black-on-black SC-357 Magnum. Without a word, he handed the gun to Kinney. The fresh-faced junior executive gulped; eyeing, first, the gun and, then, the massive form of ED 209. Kinney was having second thoughts about being a team player. Morton was enjoying it.

Jones put a fatherly arm around the startled boy. "Mr. Kinney will help us simulate a typical arrest and disarming procedure."

"I will?"

"Certainly. Now, all you have to do, Mr. Kinney, is to use your gun in a *threatening* manner. Just point it at ED 209."

Kinney glanced at the smiling board members. The men around the table giggled like schoolgirls. A red flush of embarrassment appeared on Kinney's cheeks. He shrugged and got into the swing of things. Screwing up his facial features into a scowl, but resembling a perturbed squirrel more than an actual street thug, he raised the gun toward ED 209.

The robot reacted instantly. He pivoted and faced the young executive.

Kinney began to tremble. Surprisingly, a soothing voice emerged from the mighty Droid. "Please put down your weapon. You have twenty seconds to comply. Your civil rights are currently in effect. You now have fifteen seconds to comply."

The men around the table applauded. Kinney stared at the robot, a mixture of surprise and fright on his face. Jones, smiling paternally, nodded at Kinney. "I think you better do what he says, Mr. Kinney."

Kinney allowed the gun to drop to the floor. It landed with a thud on the deep pile carpeting. He shrugged and turned to the board members.

ED 209 continued to talk in a cool, detached voice. "If you cannot afford an attorney, one will be appointed to you."

On the far side of the room, both Morton and Johnson noticed the

startled, anxious look on the face of the mousy scientist. MacNamara made eye contact with the head technician. Both men ran over to the control cart. ED 209 continued to chat. "You now have five seconds to comply."

Jones glanced anxiously at the cart. Kinney stood there, smiling like an idiot before the talkative Droid. His smile faded as the Droid slowly began to raise its left arm.

"Three . . . two . . . ," ED 209 continued.

Kinney turned to face the Old Man. The Old Man glared beyond Kinney at the control cart. Kinney glanced over his shoulder and, seeing the arm proceed on its upward arc, attempted to flee along the lengthy boardroom table.

The executives at the table gasped and dove onto the carpeted floor as ED 209 calmly traced Kinney's retreat. "One," he intoned. "You are in direct violation of Penal Code 1-13, Section 9. I am now authorized to use necessary force."

The Droid fired an extended burst from its upraised hand/cannon. Kinney was caught from behind. His chest burst in an explosion of blood and light. His body tumbled through the air, landing with a crash on the fragile model of Delta City in the middle of the table.

Morton and Johnson were on their feet. Morton dove for a phone, screaming, "Medical Concepts, get a paramedic team to the 151st floor right now."

Johnson stared at Kinney's tattered form. Rivers of blood ran through the streets of the delicately designed Delta City. ED 209, satisfied that its job was done, lowered its arm. Executives trembled beneath the table. Technicians twisted dials and knobs on the control cart frantically.

Only the Old Man, at the head of the table, remained calm. He sighed, gazed at both the broken body and the mangled model city and turned to Jones. "Dick, I'm very disappointed."

Jones tried to be casual about it all, wiping bits of blood and gore from his suit. "I'm sure it's only a glitch . . . a temporary setback."

Dr. MacNamara waddled up to the old man. "It wasn't ED's fault. He didn't hear the gun drop. The carpeting here is so thick . . . heh, heh . . ."

The Old Man ignored the babbling man in the white smock. He fixed his gaze directly on Jones. "You call this a *glitch?* We're scheduled to begin construction in four months. This 'temporary setback' could cost us fifty million dollars in interest payments alone."

"Well . . ." Jones countered.

Morton was suddenly standing between Jones and the Old Man.

“Not necessarily, sir,” he said cheerfully. The Old Man turned his attention to the wiry young executive who had appeared from nowhere.

Morton grinned and continued. “Perhaps you’re aware of the RoboCop Program that was developed by myself at Security Concepts as a contingency for just this sort of situation.”

Jones’s face began to redden. “Thank you for your concern, Mr. Morton. I’m sure this is something we can take up in my office at a more appropriate time.”

The Old Man waved Jones away. “Wait a minute, Dick. Maybe what we need here is a fresh perspective.”

Jones glowered at Morton as the Old Man went on. “Tell me about this plan of yours, Mr. Morton. How long will it take to implement?”

Morton was so happy he was bouncing on the balls of his feet. He didn’t notice that he was standing in a puddle of Kinney’s blood. “We’re ready to go, sir,” he replied. “We’ve restructured the police department and placed prime candidates according to risk factor in high danger precincts. With the prevailing conditions in Old Detroit, I’m confident we can produce an effective prototype in ninety days.”

A wide grin broke across the Old Man’s craggy face. “Good. Very good. Get your staff together, Morton. I expect a full presentation in twenty minutes.”

The Old Man patted Morton on the shoulder and strode out of the room. As he left, a group of paramedics rushed in. They weren’t expecting what they found on the board table.

“Holy shit,” one said.

“They should have ordered mops and pails.”

Morton trotted to the other side of the room and took Johnson by the hand. “I did it,” he exclaimed. “I did it!”

Johnson gazed past Morton’s shoulder and watched Jones at the far end of the table. Jones glared at them both and slowly lit a cigarette.

Johnson led Morton out of the room. He shook his head slowly. This guy didn’t even know he was in trouble.

The two entered the glass elevator alone. Morton began shuffling about. He was almost doing a tap dance. Johnson had never seen Morton so jazzed before. “That’s how it’s done in the big leagues, Johnson,” Morton bubbled. “You see an opening and you go for it.”

Johnson stared out of the glass elevator and watched the floor rise up to meet them. “Just watch your back, Bob,” he cautioned. “Jones is going to come gunning for you.”

“Fuck Jones. He fumbled the ball and I was there to pick it up. Touchdown for the home team.”

A mental picture of Kinney's surprised, lifeless eyes flashed through Johnson's mind. "Too bad about Kinney," he said softly.

Morton forced himself to calm down. "Life in the big city." He shrugged lamely.

The elevator stopped. The two men emerged in a dimly lit corridor.

"When do we start with the RoboCop prototype?" Johnson asked.

Morton heaved a gigantic sigh. "As soon as some poor schmuck volunteers."

[6]

Murphy leaned on the side of the TurboCruiser, surveying the burned-out buildings around him. A little over a decade ago, Old Detroit had still been a vibrant area; poor, but teeming with families and old-timers who had lived there for generations.

Above him, the moon peeked in and out of dark, threatening clouds.

He glanced at the lone operating burger stand on the block. Lewis, her helmet off, was paying for a couple of coffees with a credit card. Murphy eased his revolver out of his holster and practiced doing quick draw tricks.

Lewis walked over with the coffee and Murphy executed a double twirl, gunslinger style, slipping the revolver back into its holster.

Lewis smiled, handing him the coffee. "Pretty fancy moves, Murphy."

Murphy grinned sheepishly. "My kid watches this cop show—*T. J. Lazer.* This Lazer guy does that every time he takes a bad guy out."

"And you didn't want to disappoint your kid, huh?"

"Role models can be very important to a young boy."

Lewis sipped her coffee, smirking. "Uh-huh."

Murphy shrugged. "Okay. So I get a kick out of it, too."

Lewis eyed her new partner. "Married man, huh?"

"Yeah."

"Happily?"

Murphy thought a moment. "Yeah. I suppose."

"You suppose?"

"Well, I am happy. Lucky, too. I mean, I have a family to come home to at the end of the day, right? A little antidote for the insanity? But, sometimes you just get so tired . . ."

"Physically or mentally?"

Murphy sipped the coffee. "I wake up tired, Lewis. I've been a cop all my life. I came into the job wanting to save the world."

"Make the streets safe for the good folk." Lewis nodded.

"Something like that. But, you know, the longer you're at this, the more it grinds you down. You find yourself treading water. Hoping to get through each day in one piece, hoping you won't have to drill anyone."

"I know," Lewis said. "I *do* know. Imagine what it's like being single. I come home every day to a cat."

"You like cats?"

"I *hate* cats."

Murphy chuckled. "Masochism twenty-four hours a day, huh?"

Lewis drained her cup. "I figure I'm on a roll."

"I wanted a dog once. My wife didn't go for the idea. My son didn't go for the idea. Nobody wanted to walk him. He wound up getting fish."

"Fish are nice," Lewis pointed out.

"Ever try to teach a fish how to be loyal?"

"They must be a bitch to paper train, too." Lewis smiled. Murphy grinned back. Lewis had a nice smile.

A sudden thought occurred to Murphy. "Hey. I'll be right back. I've got to call my wife."

"I don't think so," Lewis replied, turning her head toward the car's dash. A beep-tone shrieked. The dash lit up. Lewis stuck her head in the open driver's window. Information began appearing on the grid. The grid-map lit up, tracking a moving blue dot.

The ComLink line began yammering. "All units in the vicinity. 211 in progress. Grid plate 107, sub-sector 16. White panel van heading north."

Murphy made a move to get past Lewis and into the driver's seat. "That's us, pardner."

Lewis smiled and slid behind the wheel. "Well, get in, pardner, or I'll take off without you."

Muttering under his breath, Murphy ran around the fired-up TurboCruiser and jumped in the passenger's side as Lewis stood on the gas. The car fishtailed away from the burger stand, leaving a plume of dust and grit behind it.

Murphy leaned forward toward the ComLink. "Central, Unit 154 responding." He stared at the pulsating blue dot zigzagging across the grid of the sector shown on the dash.

The voice of the ComLink dispatcher was calm and efficient. "We copy 154. Suspects are armed and considered extremely dangerous. Use of high explosives in connection with the robbery of . . ."

Murphy's mind wandered. It suddenly occurred to him that he should have called Jan hours ago. He didn't exactly know why that occurred to him. Mentally shrugging, he returned his attention to the blathering radio.

Blocks ahead of the TurboCruiser, a battered white van, crowded

with men, weapons, and charred sacks of money, roared down the back streets of Old Detroit.

Inside the van, Clarence Boddicker was worried. Lines were etched in his high forehead. He glanced at the feral little man driving the van, a weasel of a human named Emil. He sighed. Emil would never be more than a subhuman. He glanced at his associates huddled in the van. Idiots all. How did he, a man of such savvy, such intelligence, hook up with such an enclave of lowlifes? This was the price one had to pay to be a master thief.

Leon, a tall, shambling man, sat with his knees tucked up under his chin. Joe, a tough young black with an attitude problem, glared at his feet. Chan, a Hong Kong-born patsy whose face looked like a computer course in nervous twitching, tried not to show his fear. Barrel-chested Bobby and clean-cut Dougie glanced at each other nervously.

The smell of burnt paper filled Clarence's nostrils. Anger welled within him as Emil silently guided the van down side street after side street. Finally, Clarence snapped. He turned to Bobby. "You burnt the fucking money!"

Bobby, whose IQ approximated his belt size, was not cowed. "I hadda blow the door," he shrugged. "Whaddaya want."

Clarence, realizing rational give and take was impossible, glared out the front windshield. "It's as good as marked, now, you asshole. It's worthless. Worthless." He allowed the final "s" sound of his sentence to slither through the air, as deadly as an adder.

To punctuate the thought, he reached down to the floor and grasped a handful of burnt bills. He tossed them into Bobby's face. Bobby shrugged a second time. "Hey. Some days you eat the bear and some days the bear eats you."

Clarence didn't have time for anger. Emil was quivering behind the wheel. "Clarence! We got a cop on our tail."

Clarence glanced out of the side mirror. Indeed, there was a TurboCruiser speeding after the van. Closing fast. "This is not one of my better days," he muttered. He didn't mind killing when it was preplanned. Spontaneous slaughter, however, could really be a drag. A real drain of energy that could be used for other, more lucrative endeavors.

"Stand on it, Emil." He sighed.

Behind the van, Lewis floored the gas pedal. The TurboCruiser sliced through the darkness. Clouds obscured the moon.

"Hit it," Murphy commanded.

Lewis punched a button and, immediately, the ghetto landscape was

illuminated by the pulsating strobes of the Cruiser. The silence of the night was shattered by its screaming siren. Murphy faced the ComLink. “Central, we are in pursuit of possible 211 suspects. Request backup.”

“Fat chance,” Lewis muttered.

In the careening van, Clarence popped one stick of chewing gum after another into his mouth. He chewed furiously. “This is getting bothersome,” he whispered.

Behind him, his gang members sat nervously. Not a backbone in the bunch, Clarence thought. Emil’s teeth were chattering. “This crate ain’t gonna outrun twin turbines,” he pointed out.

Clarence sighed. Obviously, in Emil’s neighborhood, first cousins were encouraged to marry. “Well,” Clarence advised. “Slow it down, then.”

Emil gaped at his leader. “What are you, crazy?”

Clarence flashed a crocodile smile at the little man. “Emil. Please. Shut the fuck up and do as I say. Bobby, get the door.”

The van began to slow down.

Murphy sat in the passenger’s seat of the TurboCruiser. The hairs on the back of his neck slowly began to quiver. This didn’t smell right. He slid his revolver out of its holster. Lewis continued to stand on the gas. “Slow it down a little,” Murphy said.

“Why? We’re gaining on them,” Lewis answered.

Murphy shot her a look. Lewis reacted as if she had been slapped in the face.

In the back of the van, the gang members cradled their shotguns. It looked as if they’d get a couple of more bluecaps tonight. They pointed their guns in the direction of the back door. Bobby sat nearest the door, poised to kick it open with one movement of his dinosaur-sized feet.

Clarence took a deep breath. Four. Three. Two. One. “Now!!” he screamed. “Shoot to kill!”

Bobby kicked the doors open. The men in the van raised their shotguns and fired en masse. Smoke filled the back of the truck as a maelstrom of hot lead exited the speeding vehicle. Clarence blinked into the smoke. He didn’t hear the tinkle of a shattered windshield. He didn’t hear the squealing of tires. He didn’t sense the presence of mangled flesh.

Gradually, the smoke evaporated. Clarence and his men gazed out the back of the van. There wasn’t a police car to be seen. There was nothing there but street. Lots and lots of empty street. Leon, not amused, turned to Emil.

“I thought you said there was a cop back there.”

“He’s there, man. I saw him.”

Before Clarence could get a word in, the TurboCruiser appeared, leaping off the sidewalk on the left side of the street and zipping past the open back of the van.

Behind the wheel, Lewis gritted her teeth as Murphy opened fire on the alabaster truck. Instinctively, Lewis ducked as two volleys of shotgun pellets singed the air. She pulled the TurboCruiser away from the van.

“Are you okay?” she yelled.

“No problem,” Murphy replied. “I think I got one of them.”

In the back of the van, Clarence’s men were in a state of panic. Bobby clutched his bleeding leg. “Aw, shit. I’m hit, man. I’m hit.”

Joe and Chan fired another round at the police car. The TurboCruiser disappeared again.

“Man,” Joe muttered. “This is spooky shit.”

Without warning, the TurboCruiser charged again, this time from the right side of the road. A volley of bullets slammed into the side of the van. Clarence’s men hugged the cheap carpeting as the bullets thwacked harmlessly into the metal.

“My leg,” Bobby cried. “It’s bleeding.”

Clarence sat, fuming. “Shut up, Bobby. I’ve got to think.”

A bullet whizzed by the passenger mirror.

Joe, not thinking, dove across Clarence and fired his shotgun out the window, nearly taking out Clarence’s eardrum. “Sit the fuck down, Joseph,” Clarence said.

Joe glared at Clarence but did as he was told. “Close the back door,” Clarence ordered.

Chan quickly slammed the doors.

Emil continued to speed onward. A smile flashed across Clarence’s face. “Okay. I’ve got an idea.”

“They’ve accelerated again,” Murphy said, from his vantage point in the pursuing vehicle.

“They’re scared,” Lewis cackled. “They’re outclassed.”

She pressed her foot down on the accelerator, picking up speed. There was something about the setup Murphy didn’t like. He silently reloaded, keeping one eye on the van. He was about to voice his doubts to Lewis when his fears became reality.

The back of the van burst open and the screaming form of one Bobby Martin, street punk, assassin, drug user, and rapist, was tossed out toward the street by his former accomplices.

"Shit," Lewis hissed, watching the burly body hurtle through space directly toward the speeding TurboCruiser. The body struck the windshield with a sickening thud, shattering the glass and causing both Murphy and Lewis to shield their faces with their hands. Blood and bits of semi-solid matter shot into the TurboCruiser as Bobby's body continued on its way up and over the Cruiser's hood. Lewis glanced in the rearview mirror. The stocky thug's lifeless form spun wildly in the street behind them.

The force of the impact, however, caused Lewis to momentarily lose control of the speeding Cruiser. "Hold on," she yelled, playing with both the gas and the brakes, trying desperately to avoid a total spinout. The TurboCruiser slid toward the sidewalk. Murphy's eyes almost popped out of his skull. Before them was a row of a dozen parking meters.

"I hope these are the new plastic jobs," he muttered as the car plowed onward.

The TurboCruiser smashed, head-on, into the row of meters, neatly ripping them out of their concrete underpinnings. Miraculously, the impact didn't destroy the car's motor. "Let's hear it for plastic," Lewis said.

Murphy leaned into the ComLink. "Central, we are in pursuit of the suspect vehicle. Shots fired. Suspect has been injured. Request MediVac, Cod 3. 9th and Century. Priority request for backup. Repeat, Central, we are in pursuit."

Dispatch didn't reply.

"Thanks a lot," Murphy added.

Lewis eased the car to a stop.

"What happened to the van?" she asked.

Murphy studied the grid. The blue dot was speeding away from the scene, zigzagging down alleyways. These guys may have blown a heist, but they were pros when it came to inner-city guerrilla warfare.

"Hit it," Murphy said.

Lewis gunned the twin turbines, sending them screaming into the night. Murphy reached forward and killed the sirens and lights. He was tense now. Adrenaline was flowing. It was an Ahab-Great White Whale situation. If these morons would sacrifice one of their own just to slow down one lousy patrol car, they were capable of anything.

Murphy bent over the ComLink. "Central. We've got a heat track on the suspect vehicle. It's heading west on the Webster Street Bridge."

Silence was the reply.

Murphy was grinding his teeth now. Bad habit. Jan always nagged him about it. Said he'd cause sparks in bed one night and burn them

all to Valhalla. “Turn right on 19th,” he whispered to Lewis. “It’s a shortcut.”

“How do you know?”

“I grew up around here. Down that block. Used to be a nice neighborhood.”

Lewis nodded, determined to catch the van, and executed a screaming right turn.

Murphy looked up toward the sky. The clouds were clearing now. A baleful full moon shone down on the car. It made him feel uneasy. “Even a man who is pure of heart and says his prayers by night,” he began.

“Huh?”

“Just a line I remembered from an old movie. About the full moon.”

“There’s the van,” Lewis whispered.

Next to a sprawling, abandoned warehouse, the white van sat, doors open and empty, in the sickly blue light afforded by the heavens. “Pull up. Slowly,” Murphy advised.

Lewis guided the TurboCruiser past the van. “Nobody’s home,” she said.

“Over there,” Murphy said.

Lewis guided the patrol car to the side of the warehouse and killed the motor. Murphy punched their coordinates into the computerized map linked to Central. A VuScreen came to life: **ALL UNITS PRESENTLY ENGAGED—ETA: 20 MINUTES.**

Murphy shrugged. “There’s never a cop around when you need one.”

Both the cops put their helmets on. No use taking chances. They activated the ComLink radio in their suits and climbed out of the Cruiser.

Murphy pointed toward the front entrance of the warehouse. Lewis nodded and pointed her gun toward a stairway leading up to the second story. Murphy winked at her.

His ComLink squawked. “Stay in touch,” he said.

Lewis nodded, popping gum under her helmet. “Will do.”

Murphy disappeared in the front door and Lewis gazed at the rickety metal stairs towering before her. She hoped they would hold. With the grace of a cat, she swung up onto the stairway and climbed.

The interior of the warehouse was bathed in darkness. Murphy silently scanned the area. It smelled wonky to him but, hell, they were committed now. Cargo containers stretched before him, a man-made labyrinth. He darted down a row of boxes. He stopped suddenly.

Voices. Male. A half-dozen or so. Gripping his gun, he slowed his pace. He looked toward the ceiling. He hoped Lewis was all right. She was tough but, hell, when it came down to it, she was a woman. One-twenty pounds tops. No telling how big or how strong the gorillas hiding in this tomb were. He padded silently down the twisting, turning rows of boxes, listening for the voices.

Murphy took a chance. Climbing up on a stack of crates, he scanned the floor some ten feet below him. Four stacks away, he saw a small red pinprick of light. Someone was smoking. Dumb move. Swiftly and quietly, he leaped from stack to stack until he stood, poised, above two men. They were smoking a joint. The weasel he recognized from the van. It was the driver. A tall, clean-cut guy was toking with him.

Murphy made a move to leap down on them. He hesitated. Somehow, that just didn't seem the smart thing to do. He retreated along the tops of the crates, climbing down on the other side of the haphazardly constructed wall.

High above him, on the second floor, Lewis crept along a wall. The heat up there was unbearable. She undid her helmet and snapped it on the side of her uniform, keeping the ComLink on beneath her chin. She shook her hair loose. That was better. She glanced around her. She was surrounded by half-packed crates. Somewhere nearby a door opened. Without thinking, she flattened herself against the wall. It was one of those nights she wished she had pursued a career in dental hygiene. She heard the sound of heavy breathing. Close. Very, very close. She hugged the wall. She heard a zipper creak down. She smelled urine. Someone was pissing just around the corner. Sweat rolled down her face as she watched the small river of piss run by her feet. Yeah, dental hygiene seemed like the perfect career right about now.

Lewis waited until the peeing had stopped. She watched a young black man walk toward an open freight elevator. Seeing an opportunity, she ran along a mountain of boxes and positioned herself on the far side of the elevator. The black man, a damp spot still on the crotch of his pants, walked forward to the lift, fiddling with his zipper. Within an instant, Lewis was upon him. She put a gun to his head.

"Freeze," Lewis ordered in a cool monotone.

The man stopped at the door. His fly was still open.

He glanced at the young female cop. This was embarrassing.

"Okay, let's see those hands," Lewis whispered. "Nice and easy."

Joe used one free hand to jiggle his zipper in an exaggerated manner. "Sure, baby, nice and easy. You mind if I zip this thing up?"

"Go ahead."

He waited until he was sure the cop's attention was focused on his

crotch before he slowly lifted a blackjack from his rear pocket with his free hand. Lewis sighed and allowed Joe to fiddle with his fly. She didn't see the blackjack coming.

Joe chuckled as the blunt instrument smashed into her face. Lewis reeled, toppling toward the open elevator shaft. She clawed the air, trying to grab hold of something, anything, solid. She felt the ground move from beneath her feet as she tumbled backward into the shaft. Her senses askew, she had the presence of mind to twist her body midair, aiming her feet at the ground far below. She hit and hit hard, sprawling into a puddle of dark, stagnant water and grease. She gasped for air. Pain sliced through her forehead. Her consciousness ebbed as a rat scurried by. Soon, all was darkness.

Joe stared down the shaft. Maybe if the cop wasn't too banged up, he'd get to have a little fun before he killed her. He smiled to himself, picked up his autoload shotgun and headed for the stairway leading down to the first floor.

Dougie and Emil continued to smoke their joint. Dougie enjoyed toking up, but Emil? He had problems. Paranoia. He felt uneasy about everything when he was wrecked. He saw shadows. Heard sounds. Felt like people were watching him. Like, now, for instance.

He stared at the figure of a cop, pistol drawn, standing not six feet away from him. He glanced at the joint in his hand. This was some *good* stuff. He handed the joint back to Dougie. Dougie, too, seemed to be having the same hallucination. Then the hallucination spoke.

"Hello, boys," Murphy said.

Dougie made a move for his shotgun. He didn't get far. Murphy fired a single shot into his chest. Dougie dropped to the ground, writhing. Emil shook his head clear. Unless he was mistaken, hallucinations didn't fire sidearms. He glanced at his own autoload sitting next to a crate not two feet away.

Murphy shrugged his shoulders. "Dead or alive, pal. Either way, you're coming with me."

Emil allowed the gun to sit where it was. Murphy walked forward and kicked it away. Reaching behind his back with his free hand, he produced a pair of handcuffs. He tried to hide the fact that his hands were trembling. He didn't like having had to fire a shot. He gave himself away on that move. He lowered his lips toward his ComLink. "Lewis. I got a situation here. Hey, lady. You copy me?"

Emil's wide eyes were darting this way and that. Murphy effectively lowered his voice into a snarl. "Okay, tough guy, you know the routine. Hands on your head."

Murphy made a move forward to cuff Emil. Something behind him made an all-too-familiar "ka-chunk." He turned his helmeted head

upward. Chan pointed an autoload directly at Murphy's forehead. The reed-thin form of Leon appeared from Murphy's right side. "Why don't you let us take it from here, Emil."

Leon trained his shotgun on Murphy's midsection. "How about dropping your gun, cop."

Murphy gritted his teeth as Leon placed the barrel of the shotgun against his neck. He slowly lowered his gun hand, letting the Mateba fall. Emil ran toward the cop.

"Your ass is mine, pig!"

The litte man froze as a calm and soothing voice emerged from the shadows. "Not yet, it isn't."

Clarence Boddicker wiped a bead of perspiration off his elongated forehead and smiled. "Take his helmet off. I'd like to gaze upon our hero in the flesh."

Emil ripped the helmet from Murphy's face. Murphy glared at Clarence. "Glad to see you," Clarence said, sincerely.

In the back of his mind, Murphy worried about Lewis. He hoped she had gotten away. He hoped she had radioed for backup. He hoped . . .

A gun barrel came smashing up into his chin. He tumbled back onto a wall of crates, dazed. "Party time." Clarence grinned.

Thirty feet away, at the bottom of the elevator shaft, Lewis came to, hearing faint voices. She moved her body slowly, tiny shards of pain making themselves felt at each joint. Nothing broken. She slowly got to her feet. The floor level of the warehouse loomed ten feet above her.

"Shit," she hissed.

A rat zipped by her feet. This definitely was not a place to linger. She made a running jump for the dangling, grease-encrusted cables. Slowly, she began to climb, her legs wrapped around the oozing metal rods. Her hands began to slip. Grease cascaded onto her knuckles. She found herself sliding back down onto the bottom of the shaft with a thud. She stared at her hands. They were bleeding and raw.

"Goddamn," she swore. She began to climb again. "Murphy," she whispered, "where are you when I need you?"

Clarence's foot slammed into the side of Murphy's face, opening a large gash under his right eye. The gangleader circled the fallen policeman casually, his shotgun tipped casually over his shoulder. Every so often, he'd extend the toe of his shoe and prod it into a section of Murphy's prone body, like a butcher examining a piece of prime beef.

"Are you a good cop?" Clarence bent over to gaze at the policeman's name tag. "Officer Murphy?"

Murphy remained silent, staring at Clarence's twisted expression. "Sure," Clarence said. "You've got to be some kind of great cop to come in here all by yourself."

Clarence smiled pleasantly. Before Murphy had time to react he swung the autoload off his shoulder and sent the butt of the gun slamming into Murphy's midsection. Murphy doubled over. He fought to control the tears caused by the pain. If he was going to die, he wouldn't give these streetscum the satisfaction of seeing him cringe.

He blinked suddenly. He might die. He swallowed hard. That idea had always been an abstract before. Something to consider in the future. Now, the possibility hit him full force. He thought of Jan and Jimmy. He cursed himself for not calling home.

Clarence bent over Murphy's face. "Where's your partner, Murphy?"

"The other one was upstairs," said Joe, walking casually to the spot. "I took her out."

Murphy made a move to sit up. Not the smartest thing to do. Clarence extended a foot and, placing it on Murphy's chest, pushed the cop back down. "I bet that really pisses you off," Clarence said. "You probably don't think I'm a very nice guy."

"Actually," Murphy said, "I think you're slime."

"Humor," Clarence said, laughing wildly. The gang members behind him giggled as well. "A touch of humor. How refreshing."

He took his other foot and slammed it down on Murphy's right arm, extending the limb flat against the concrete floor. "I have this problem, Murphy. You don't like me. I didn't expect you to. You see, cops don't like me."

He slowly placed the muzzle of his shotgun against Murphy's right wrist. "So . . . I don't like cops."

Clarence flashed an easygoing smile as he squeezed the trigger. Murphy's senses reeled as a deep rush of pain cascaded up and down his right side. He turned in time to see his right hand blow clean off his arm. Throwing off Clarence's foot, he grabbed the stump of his right arm and clutched it. Blood was spurting from his wrist in steady pulsations. He tried to speak. He couldn't. His vocal cords seemed fused together. The pain from his arm was throwing him into shock.

He slowly got to his feet. He stared at Clarence, blinking his eyes wildly. These were the cop killers. The jackals. Clarence turned his back on the staggering cop and, swinging his shotgun back over his shoulder, walked away whistling. He paused and turned to his gang members. "Now he's all yours."

Murphy stood, tottering, before the others. Emil, the ferret-faced punk, picked up his shotgun and fired. The concussion of the blast

tossed Murphy five feet into the air. Sailing through space, Murphy stared down and witnessed his chest burst forth out of his protective armor suit.

He found himself in a sitting position some ten feet away from the gang members. He saw his legs twitch. He felt like a marionette whose strings were slowly being severed. He was losing his sight. The room was tilting this way and that. He noticed Chan and Joe pick up their shotguns. They squeezed the trigger. The air seemed to explode around him.

The side of his armor suit shattered and, then, simply flew away into the night. Murphy struggled to maintain his perspective. This all seemed like some drunken dream. Images were both slowing down and speeding up simultaneously.

He almost laughed as the Asian walked right up to him, pointing the muzzle of his shotgun directly against Murphy's shoulder, and fired. Murphy's entire right arm went twirling away from his torso. Amazing, Murphy thought. He was beyond pain, now. His severed arm was still spinning like one of those TV gameshow wheel of fortune arrows. Spin the bottle? Lose the arm?

One of the gang members placed Murphy's helmet back on his head. Another gang member shot it off, taking a hunk of Murphy's hairline away with it. Two more blasts. Murphy watched his legs shatter.

Murphy's body seemed possessed by a strange and wild rhythm, something totally new, something almost paranormal. He found himself trying to stand upright on his shattered limbs. He felt himself tip backward.

A thunderclap smashed through his brain. The sound of his head smacking into the concrete floor. He stared straight ahead. The room wasn't there anymore, not in detail anyway. Rather, the essence of the room seemed to hover above him. A dash of purple. A dash of cold steel blue. A crate or two, represented by a splotch of brown.

Then, there were the faces. High-foreheaded Clarence, a business-minded harlequin. Feral Emil, his deep-set eyes blinking wildly. Lanky Leon, a hayseed with a killer's instinct. Cool and impassive Joe, globs of Murphy's blood dripping off his black cheekbones. Chan, yellow and impassive, laughing silently.

Murphy turned his head slightly on its side. He saw the men hover before him. Joe lowered his shotgun and shrugged. "I'm outta ammo."

Clarence stepped forward and, pulling a Desert Eagle .44 out of his belt, nonchalantly aimed the pistol at Murphy's head and squeezed off an easy round. Murphy felt the bullet burrow into his left temple. He felt part of his head dribble off in back. The air seemed cold above him, now. Clarence slid the gun back into his belt. He didn't twirl it,

T. J. Lazer-style. Murphy would have smiled if he had control of his muscles. The gang-leader definitely lacked class.

Clarence motioned to his associates. “Okay. Fun’s over. Let’s split.”

The figures of the men melted away into the darkness. Suddenly, Murphy remembered the expression on his father’s face years ago, when the older man lay dying in his own living room. Murphy understood the humor now. He appreciated the ironic sting of the term “an act of random violence.” Random for the perpetrators, maybe, but certainly not the victim. He sighed. He felt his body twitching in long, bone-splintering convulsions.

What a stupid way to die. Laughable, really.

The ground beneath him seemed to rumble. Footsteps. He blinked his eyes, trying desperately to focus his vision. He watched Lewis skid to a halt some five feet away from his shattered form. Murphy sighed. The cavalry had arrived at last.

“Awww, Murphy,” Lewis said softly.

Outside the warehouse, a van roared to life, screaming away into the night.

Lewis knelt beside Murphy. She made a move to cradle his head in her arms. His skull was so badly shattered that she wasn’t sure what to grab. She leaned forward into her ComLink mike. “Officer down,” she blurted. “Repeat. Officer down. Central, I need a MediVac Unit right now . . . my partner’s been shot.”

Murphy smiled from within. He was wrong about Lewis. She was strong. A survivor. So what if she was a woman? Most men would be puking their guts out right about now and there she was, taking charge. He wanted to hug her. But he only had one arm.

He vaguely heard the dispatcher’s voice. “Calm down, patrolman. Help is on the way.”

Lewis didn’t appreciate the dispatcher’s dispassion. “You calm down, you asshole. Get a MediVac here now or *you’re* going to need one. Copy?”

“Copy.”

Lewis sat down, Indian-style, next to Murphy’s twitching form. She smiled at him. A single tear rolled down her eye. Murphy gazed at her. Her features were alternately hazy and sharp. For a few seconds, she was every woman he had ever cared about. A chuckle rumbled deep within his chest. It emerged from his throat as a slow, hissing sound.

He gazed into Lewis’s eyes and twisted what was left of his lips into a smile. He forced his vocal cords to respond. He wanted to tell Lewis exactly what was going on. He wanted to explain to her exactly what

it felt like to have the life blasted out of you, to lose touch with your body, to watch the world fade into a series of abstract shapes and forms.

He looked at her meaningfully. “Sumbitch,” was all he said.

[7]

A woman was crying somewhere. He heard it. He couldn't quite get a fix on where it was coming from. He tilted his head. Oh, Lewis. Yes, Lewis was her name. He knew that. He couldn't quite place the face. He turned his head further. A machine was nearby. With large slats on top, whirling. Whirly. Whirlybird. Helicopter. He remembered that. Very good. Very good indeed.

A steady thump. That would be his heart. Sounded like a drumbeat. Very good. He remembered that. And the loud rushing noise echoing through his ears? His blood. Blood coursing through veins. His veins. He still retained that. Very good.

He was losing a lot though. He realized this. Even now, his memory was fading. He visualized a small home. A smiling woman and a little boy. Their names were Jan and Jimmy. He wasn't quite sure who they were, but he remembered their names. Very, very good.

He was being lifted. Or was he flying? No, there were hands around him, lifting him into a stretcher pod. Someone was strapping his good hand down securely. Securely. Safely. He took his job to make people safe. That was a good thing. His other arm couldn't be safe. Couldn't be tied down securely. His other arm was somewhere else. He stared upward into the blades of the helicopter.

A man in white shone a flashlight down into his face. "Jesus, I think this guy's still alive."

He felt the pod sway and saw the stars come closer. He was definitely flying now. Flying high and far, to a land where children never had to grow up or go to school and act like adults. Children. Small people. Jimmy. That was the small person's name. Jimmy. It was a good name. It matched the small person's smile. Happy. Jimmy.

Thup-thup-thup-thup. It wasn't his heart this time. It was the blades of the helicopter as they flew. He could feel his eyeballs bouncing around in their sockets. He was losing control. It didn't matter. There wasn't much to see at this point. Someone wiped the blood off his face. That was nice. But it didn't matter. The blood felt warm. It was good to feel warm. His right arm felt cold. Wherever it was.

He slowed down his eyeballs and tilted his head. Lights were everywhere. Bright, friendly lights. The lights on the helicopter. The lights of the city below. City. Filled with houses. Houses. Where people lived. People like Jan and Jimmy. Nice people. Strangers, now.

Thup-thup-thup-thup. It couldn't be the helicopter, anymore. He was inside somewhere. Voices were echoing off something solid. Thup-thup-thup. Had to be his heart. He knew that. Very good. Green walls. Yellow lights. Concerned faces. Low, tense talk. Hospital. That was it, he was in a hospital. He was proud of himself for figuring all that out. People have their hands in him. He's still moving.

Sliding doors bang open and closed. Tubes are being stuck into him. Tendrils. He's a squid now. Liquid bubbling nearby. Whoops. He's underwater, now. He swims for the surface frantically. Mom is waiting for him. "Keep your head above the water. You're going to be all right."

Damned straight he was. After all, he was. Whoever. He couldn't remember that one. His name would come to him soon. He knew that. He turned and hit the school bully in the face. The little girl gave him a kiss. He knew her. It was Jan. A little person. There's Jan again. Older. She looks so beautiful in that white dress. Man and wife. His wife. Who was he, though?

A loud voice crashed through the fog. The dreams shattered. "I've got a straight line. Crash cart! 10 cc Adrenalin. Stand clear!"

He felt cold grease on his chest. A surge of electricity slammed into his muscles. There was the ferret-faced thug.

"Hit him again!" someone screamed. A sudden jolt conjured up the face of the Asian hit man. Another jolt. The farmboy. And another. The black man. And another. The high-foreheaded clown who blew his hand to shreds. His killers. He bade farewell to them all. Only blackness filled his life, now. A void.

"That's it. He's gone," he heard someone say from another planet.

"Okay. Hook him up. Patch him up. I'll make the call." The voices went away. All was quiet. All was still. No more thup-thup-thup. Everything just went away.

For a while.

Then, he was aware again.

Blackness still enveloped him. Something percolated far, far away. A steady hum. Life jangled through him. Of a sort. He could no longer feel the blood rushing through his veins. He tried to open his eyes. He couldn't feel the lids. He was floating. That was it. He was floating.

A flash of white caused his muscles to contract. His body was still beneath him. He tried to get a mental fix on his functions. It was useless.

Green lines. A grid. A computer grid. Where was the screen? Was he seeing it? No, he was *feeling* it. *Sensing* it. A high-pitched squeal caused him to wince internally. Color bars, the kind you see on a television

set at four in the morning after the tape of “The Star-Spangled Banner” blipped off, suddenly filled his existence. The colors faded and changed hues. They bounced. They zigzagged all around him in a swirl. Then, they were gone. And he missed them.

Snap.

Blackness.

“Shit,” someone whispered.

Snap. He was out of the darkness, now. In a hospital. Human forms hovered above him. He saw beyond them. High-tech equipment everywhere. Corporate heaven? Wait. Something was wrong. The figures were in black and white. He had to be hallucinating. A giddy feeling rumbled through his brain. He wanted to laugh. He was caught in an old movie, perhaps. A movie from the 1930s. He tried to smile. He wasn’t sure if he still had a mouth. He felt nothing. Not good.

“Are we locked in?” one of the white faces said.

Suddenly, the white face was pink. Pinker. Bright red. He heard a snap. Darkness again. The hum in the background enveloped him, bathing him in a calm, relaxed aura. He was asleep yet fully aware. The humming noise kept him company.

A fog enveloped him. Clouds of swirling thoughts.

He saw a beautiful woman and boy. They had no faces. They were fading fast. What were their names? Whose names? He didn’t remember. What was happening? Time had come to a stop.

Click. Click. Click.

The humming grew louder. Not threatening. Dominant, now. The hospital room, the lab room, was back. Three-dimensional. Living color. A skinny, nervous man bounced on the balls of his feet above him. A black man in a suit was there, too. They were moving their lips. Sound was coming from them. What was this called? What were they doing? Speech. Did he remember that? Speech. Very, very good.

A whitecoat talked to them both. “Mr. Morton. Mr. Johnson. Glad to have you here. We were able to save his left arm.”

Arm?

The fidgety man wasn’t pleased. “What? I thought we agreed on total body prosthesis. Lose the arm, okay?”

The speaker stared down at him. “Can he understand what I’m saying?”

A voice from beyond replied. “It doesn’t matter. We’re going to blank his memory anyhow.”

Memory? Did he remember that?

Morton turned to his associate. “I think we should lose the arm. What do you think, Johnson?”

Johnson shrugged. “He signed the release forms when he joined the force. Legally, he’s dead. We can do pretty much what we want.”

Morton walked away. “Great. Let’s lose the arm.”

Another voice. “Okay. Shut him down and prep him for surgery.”

Click. Darkness. “Can you bring the system up for a minute? I gotta check something.”

The words became garbled. The voices fell under the spell of the constant humming. He relaxed, allowing himself to fall into the strange sensation that had taken him over . . . when? Why was it strange? This was life. This was existence. Wasn’t it?

Click. The lab once again materialized from the void. Morton. Johnson. Two white suits. Two new dark suits.

The two dark suits fed words to each other. The white suits made noises among themselves. Volley after volley of word-sounds. He had trouble hearing the words. He didn’t understand them, but realized they dealt with his existence, somehow.

“Our studies have shown the importance of Human Recognition Factor in the acceptance of authority,” said one dark suit.

“Thanks. Let’s test the neural connectors before we lock down the joint,” babbled a white blur.

“We’re getting into shaky legal territory here. It’s not clear what the legal ramifications would be if a former associate were to recognize the deceased,” darkblur pointed out.

Morton interrupted. “Look, he’s a law enforcement product. He should look like a tough son-of-a-bitch.”

A flash of light nearby. Two white suits conferred. “Where’s my laser ratchet? If I’m going to slice, I’ll need my laser ratchet.”

“Use mine. I think the air-conditioner guy borrowed yours yesterday.”

“Goddamn it! Those things don’t grow on trees, you know. Hey, Arnie. Give me a DDQ, 4 amps over.”

“Watch his head. Okay, tilt back. Careful. Right there.”

“Don’t worry about the S-series. It’s a temporary patch.”

Words. Singsongish noises. Blending. Forming a melody. Silly. Hummm. Flash. A mechanical hand appeared before him. The fingers flexed back and forth, open and shut. Silly. He wanted to laugh. A mechanical hand. Like a toy. A toy? Did he remember that? No, he didn’t think so.

Darkness. Then lines. Grids. Target sites. Numbers. More numbers. Maps of city streets. Legal codes. Hummm. He was quite enjoying all this. What a show. What a grand, glorious show. How was this hallucination accomplished? He wasn’t seeing this. Yet, he was

registering it all. Ingesting it. Wonderful *things.* He sighed, almost missing the singsongish forms in black and white suits who flung their words meaninglessly around him.

Crash! What? A high-pitched voice. “Come on. Let’s turn him on.”

A female voice. Female. A woman. Different than a man, yet the same. Did he remember that? He didn’t know. Everything was new. Everything was odd. He should have panicked. But what was panic? Something he might have known once yet, now, the word sounded empty. Meaningless. Empty. Hollow. That was it. He was hollow.

Something jolted. A white form floated above him. Long hair. Ugly blue streaks around its eyes. Lips painted bright red. Breath smelling of . . . numbers and words flashed over her form . . . **90 PERCENT ALCOHOLIC SUBSTANCE, IMPORTED FROM RUSSIA. VODKA.** A woman. Inebriated. Blood alcoholic content above legal percentage. Should she be driving? How did he know that? Did he remember that?

More staggering white forms beyond her. A male face. Directly in front of his. “Hey! He’s looking at us!”

White forms all around him. Glasses filled with liquid, raised in a toast. Blowing into hollow, reedy, metal tubes. Noisemakers. Did he remember that? The woman leaned forward, her lips parted. Her lips on his . . . *flesh?* Startling feeling. A woman and a child vanishing in the background of his mind. No faces. No names. Never a part of his existence. Sensory jolts exploded all around him. Alcoholic breath. Cheap perfume. Electrical currents. A voice. Laughing over him.

“Happy New Year, RoboCop!”

So that was it.

He was a cop.

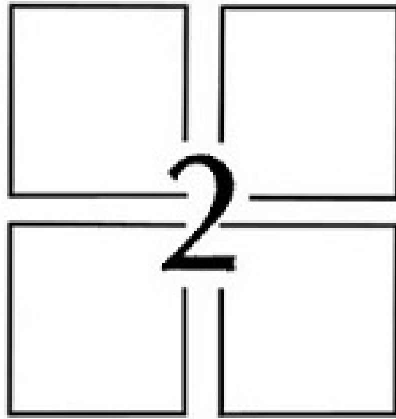
A good cop.

Did he remember that? Good. Very, very good.

Click.

Darkness.

PART



The danger of the past was that men became slaves.
The danger of the future is that man may become robots.

—Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862)

[8]

By now, he had come to know Morton's voice. Despite its nervousness, the voice had a certain sense of authority to it, a definite sense of intelligence. There was something base about it as well, a lack of feeling. It was a totally objective conclusion he had come to by weighing inflection, rate of speech, and fluctuations in pitch as well as breathing. Actually, it was no great insight on his part. It was part of his function, under the heading Voice Stress Analyzer.

He also knew when he was being activated and when he was being shut down. He had come to expect the "clicks" on a fairly regular basis. The clicking sound signaled the moment his internal systems took charge of his form. Or gave up control to the white-coated figures. When he was off duty, he was surrounded by blackness and the constant hum of his heart. He was activated now. Standing outside two large golden doors. Dr. Roosevelt, a bland, one-dimensional man he had come to know from the lab, was standing next to him, whistling softly. He gazed down at Roosevelt. The man had a bald spot on the very top of the head which he tried to cover by plastering his hair down and combing it in a swirl over the pink swath of skin. Did this intelligent scientist actually believe that no one would notice that?

He dismissed the thought.

"Such are the stuff that dreams are made of." Roosevelt smiled happily.

Dreams. Noun. A series of images or thoughts in the mind of a person asleep; an idle fancy; a vision; an aspiration. He considered this. He did not have dreams. He was not programmed for that.

He tilted his head and concentrated, increasing the amp power of his audio system intake. He could hear Morton on the other side of the door.

Morton's voice betrayed great pride. "We get the best of both worlds. The fastest reflexes modern technology has to offer, onboard computer-assisted memory, and a lifetime of on-the-street law enforcement 'programming.' Gentlemen, I would like to present . . . RoboCop."

The doors opened. He stepped inside and scanned the room. Data printouts slid by his eyes, both above and below the main focus of his attention. The room was twenty by forty. The table in its center fifteen

feet by five feet. There were twenty men sitting around it. Executives of OmniConsumer Corp. There were thirty additional men seated along the wall.

He took four steps onto the carpeting. The pile was two and a half inches thick. Morton stood at the far end of the table next to a smiling white-haired man and two army generals. Johnson, Morton's fellow worker, was staring beyond RoboCop. RoboCop turned and faced a scowling man positioned at the opposite end of the table.

Richard Jones. Operations Manager of Security Concepts. Age: 51.

RoboCop stood at attention before the assembled. One by one, the men in the room stood. They began to slap their hands together, great, childlike grins across their faces. Slap. Slap. Slap. Applause. He knew they were honoring him. He had no idea why.

Dr. Roosevelt nodded and RoboCop turned to leave the room. He passed by a full-length mirror on the way out and saw himself for the first time in his existence. He didn't break stride but he memorized the vision, etching it into his memory.

He was tall. Padded. Broad-shouldered. He was wearing a large, segmented suit of armor . . . an exaggerated police uniform. His hands seemed titanic, almost too large to fit on the arms that held them. He rushed through his memory banks to try to find an analogy for the uniform. He managed to compare it to a hybrid of the suits worn by medieval knights and football players.

He had a helmet on, stretching from his skull to down below his chin. His eyes peered out from a large slit in the upper part of armored appliance. It was tinted light blue. There was an open section between the nose and the jawline where a stern mouth was revealed. A mouth. Surrounded by pink. Cheekbones were exposed. High and regal. He considered this for a minute. Human flesh. Flesh. A heartbeat. Blood coursing through veins. Did he remember that? No. It was probably just a piece of information he had gleaned from the biology tapes.

He dismissed his findings as unimportant.

[9]

A group of six children were hurling cats back and forth when the motorcade pulled up in front of the Old Detroit station. The setting sun bathed the three white station wagons and the white semi in an eerie orange glow. The six pre-teeners gaped at the cleanliness of the cars. They were impressed. So much so that they let the cats go free.

A small army of blue jumpsuited technicians scrambled out of the station wagons and ran for the semi.

“What’s this, an invasion?” One ten-year-old smirked.

“They don’t look like Martians,” another kid said.

“Nah. They look like plumbers or something.”

The kids walked over to the semi, where the technicians were carefully pulling a covering off some object in the back. The kids’ eyes widened when they saw what was inside. They ran away from the motorcade, yammering in fractured syllables.

A black limo rumbled up to the curbside. Morton and Johnson emerged.

Inside the precinct house, Sergeant Reed sat, bored, in his elevated desk. It was a pretty dull night. It was only starting, though. He expected the worst to happen after ten o’clock. It always did. The kids were in bed and the adults were free to screw up. Meanwhile, he had to log this creep in.

He gazed down at the lowlife next to the bored officer below him. The prisoner was dressed like an old-fashioned Latin lover, replete with pencil-thin mustache and shellacked hair. He also had an attitude problem. Reed had an earnest desire to correct that, but there were laws against manslaughter that even cops had to obey.

“I’m what you call a repeat offender, man,” the prisoner rapped. “I repeat, I will offend again. You see, I get my orders from a higher source.”

Reed stared down at him from his Brobdingnagian desk. “Shaddap, asshole. I’m the highest authority here.”

Reed’s jaw dropped with a crack when he saw the door to the precinct house opened. Morton and Johnson stood in the doorway, followed by a half dozen technicians carrying large boxes. Dr. Roosevelt, looking more tired than usual, motioned them forward.

Reed was not amused. The guys acted like they owned the place.

"You folks think you have squatter's rights here or something?" he asked. He noticed the OmniCon seal on the boxes. Morton ignored Reed.

"There's a holding cell on this floor that's set up for observation," he said to Roosevelt.

The scientist produced a floor plan on his ever-present clipboard. "Looks perfect."

Reed slowly climbed down from his desk and approached the corporate invasion force. Four technicians, carrying a large piece of electrical equipment which resembled a throne, squeezed through the front door.

"Excuse me, Mr. . . ." Reed began.

"Morton."

"Mr. Morton. You look like a very civilized man."

"Thank you."

"May I ask you a very civilized question?"

"Certainly."

"What the *fuck* is going on here, anyway!!!?" Reed's red face now resembled a sea of lava.

Morton ignored him. He turned to Johnson. "Who is this guy?"

Johnson checked a file. "Sergeant John Reed."

Morton faced the irate sergeant. "OmniCon. Security Concepts. Piss off."

Morton and Roosevelt walked toward the holding cell in back, Morton still chatting. Johnson executed a "what can I tell you?" shrug in Reed's direction. Reed watched a half dozen more technicians haul in a ton of equipment. "Looks like a fucking safari," he muttered.

He stormed back to his desk and lifted his phone, dialing while sputtering. "This is bullshit. I take my orders from cops, not guys in shiny suits and . . ."

His eyes nearly popped out of his head. The entire precinct house lapsed into silence. Everyone in the room, prisoners, cops, lawyers, snitches, and bail bondsmen gawked at the door. Two men in blue jumpsuits held the doors open wide.

Robo stepped into the Old Detroit station.

A tall, scar-faced prisoner pissed in his pants. "What is this shit, man?"

The cop next to him shook his head. "I'll be damned if I know."

Reed stopped dialing the phone. The thing in the doorway looked like a mechanical mountain, shaped vaguely like a man. Reed tried to figure out if it was a man in a high-tech suit or a high-tech concept in

a man's britches. He didn't know why, but he figured this meant trouble for the precinct. And if it meant trouble for the precinct, it meant trouble for the entire force.

Robo took three titanic steps into the room. He scanned the area carefully, noting the ratio of prisoners to police. He then walked through the room.

Lewis stepped out of the bathroom and stared at the hulking figure marching by. "Why is that power mower wearing a policeman's uniform?" she asked Starkweather, paralyzed at a desk.

"I don't know," Starkweather replied. "But mine never looked that good on me."

"I don't think yours was welded on."

Starkweather slowly got to his feet. "You want to check it out?"

"In a minute," Lewis said. "I need coffee."

Starkweather watched the blond policeman walk away. She was a cool one. The rest of the cops in the room watched Robo march toward the holding cell with a mixture of awe and admiration. The *thing* was wearing a policeman's uniform, of sorts. The padding was bigger and stronger and shinier and looked a lot more formidable but, essentially, it was the same design as that of an ordinary working cop.

The cops in the precinct room crowded a small observation window that looked in on the holding cell.

Robo was led into the large chair by his two technicians. Other technicians hooked up banks of equipment to the throne. Roosevelt watched the printouts chug from the laser printer. Robo leaned back into the chair, setting off several lights in the portion of the throne above his head. Roosevelt motioned for his assistant, a bearded fellow named Tyler, to move forward.

Tyler stood directly in front of Robo. "Whenever you are at rest, you will sit in this chair. Okay?"

Robo nodded. "Yes, I understand."

The crowd of cops looked at each other in amazement. The voice was human.

Roosevelt produced a small card, a compuMap, and held it in front of Morton. "We can check his location at all times with one of these. Here he is right here."

Morton gazed at the small card. A dot glowed in the center of the grid representing Old Detroit. "Uh, how does he eat?" Morton asked.

Roosevelt glanced at the towering automated cop. "His digestive tract is extremely simple."

He pointed to a small machine which resembled a cigarette dispenser. "This processor manufactures a rudimentary paste that

sustains his organic systems."

Morton walked up to the machine curiously. He extended a finger toward a button on the unit. He looked back at Roosevelt, a questioning expression on his face. Roosevelt nodded. Morton pushed the button. A brown paste oozed into a paper cup. Morton extended his left forefinger and scooped up a wad of the stuff. He placed a bit of it on the tip of his tongue. He furrowed his brow. "It tastes like . . . baby food."

"Well." Roosevelt grinned. "In a manner of speaking, he *is* a child."

"Some baby," Johnson smirked from behind Morton.

At that point, Reed blustered into the room. "Okay. Okay. I got the word. I have to play host to this . . . tin can. But I don't have to like it."

Morton and Johnson exchanged looks. The sergeant would have to be pacified. "Sergeant Reed," Morton said. "I promise you, Robo will outperform any cop on the force. He'll wind up saving lives. You'll see."

"I doubt that," Reed replied.

"Would you like to see a demonstration of what he can do?"

Reed glared at Morton.

Morton shrugged. "Really. I'd like to show you."

Reed and Morton left the holding cell. Johnson turned to Robo. "Come on, junior. Time to score some points with the nice sergeant for daddy."

Dr. Roosevelt frowned. "He's not a toy, Mr. Johnson."

"No shit," Johnson said, walking out of the holding cell. Robo followed.

Robo marched down several corridors. Although this place was a new environment he felt safe here. Secure. Securely. Tie it down securely. He glanced at the walls. They were green and ugly. The paint was chipping. Yet, despite its aesthetic defects, it seemed like a good place to be.

Thunder roared ahead of him. Four doors to the right. Morton and Reed stepped inside. Johnson led Roosevelt, Tyler, and Robo into the firing range.

Four cops stood at the firing line, their ears covered by bafflers. Robo consulted his personnel file. Officers Lewis, Starkweather, Ramirez, and Manson. He watched them fire their pistols at moving, human-shaped paper targets, gliding beneath digital screens computing their score. They were good. Not perfect, but very good. He calculated that Lewis, the best of them, would end up scoring an 87. Very effective shooting.

Morton handed Robo a gun. “Go ahead.”

Robo walked up to the firing line.

Lewis continued to fire, the sound of thunder all around her. Gradually, she noticed that one round of gunshots was louder and more distinctive than the others. A steady, sure pacing. Wham. Wham. Wham. Wham. No hesitation.

After a few seconds, she found that she was the only cop present still firing . . . except for the steady, even drone of the new entry.

She walked over to the corner where Starkweather, Ramirez, and Manson were standing along with a dozen or so other cops.

Starkweather motioned to Lewis. “Get a load of Super Cop.”

Lewis stared at the titanic android. “Get a load of his gun,” was all she said.

Robo, surrounded by scientists and technicians wearing sound bafflers, grasped a huge Auto-9; a sidearm with enough kick to blast through a tree at twenty yards. Morton, smiling, with his fingers in his ears, nodded at Reed. Reed was impressed in spite of himself. Robo held on to the gun with two hands and fired off round after even round. He finished a clip and, within seconds, loaded another and resumed firing with military precision.

Ramirez whistled through his teeth. “I like this guy’s style.”

“He’s not a guy. He’s a machine,” Manson pointed out.

“I wonder what he’s here for,” Lewis wondered aloud.

“Maybe they’re going to replace us,” Manson blurted.

Starkweather clenched his teeth. “No fucking way any machine is going to replace me.”

“You’re a lot cuter than he is,” Lewis said, elbowing him. “Don’t sweat it.”

Robo fired round after round after round. The bullets sliced into the chest of the moving silhouette. Each clip produced a perfect circle of small round holes in the “heart” of the target. The cops watched in amazement as Robo loaded clip after clip, firing determinedly. Finally, after eight clips, the target simply collapsed, torn ragged by the steady stream of hot lead.

Lewis stared at the digital readout above the target. Perfect score. 100.

She glanced at the towering RoboCop. Robo watched the target collapse, read his score and, then, spun the A-9 on his finger, twirling it easily into his holster. Lewis gaped at the Olympian mechanical figure. She’d seen that move before. Only once. She tried gazing at the face beneath the mask.

Moving forward past a gaggle of technicians, she approached Robo.

Robo, however, marched right by her, following Morton, his mentor.

Lewis watched the broad-shouldered figure disappear down the hall. She shrugged and laughed to herself. She was probably going crazy. There wasn't the slightest resemblance.

[10]

Robo sat in the holding cell and watched Tyler, Roosevelt, and the technicians hover around him. They all carried clipboards and checklists. He was aware that they were all very excited about him without really noticing he was there. A sudden thought floated through his brain. It was reassuring to be considered a *thing.* Did he remember that? No. Not really. Morton paced up and down before him, sweating. He was cheerful. That was odd.

Tyler glanced at a technician. “Test the targeting grid.”

Tyler pointed his pen at different objects in the room. A toilet. A box. Morton’s leg. Robo noticed them all. As he saw them, however, a small series of green lines appeared superimposed over them. They united and formed a round target.

“Check,” said a technician.

Robo listened to Tyler bark commands and questions. The technicians answered in a litany of “checks.”

Green lines and graphics poured through his brain. He didn’t actually comprehend what they were designed for but he rationalized that they were an integral part of his functioning. After a few moments, Tyler turned to Morton. “He’s ready.”

Morton smiled so hard his teeth ached. “Great. Can we have some privacy?”

Tyler, Roosevelt, and the rest scurried out of the room. Morton bent down over Robo. Robo saw both the man and the biographical printout that went along with his face. Morton placed a paternal hand on Robo’s shoulder. “RoboCop,” he intoned. “What are your prime directives.”

A series of sentences flashed across Robo’s vision. Dutifully, he recited them as they printed out in his brain center. “Directive One: Serve the public trust. Directive Two: Uphold the law. Directive Three: Protect the innocent. Directive Four . . .” Robo hesitated. “Directive four is *classified.”*

Morton removed his hand. “Very good. Very, very good.”

Robo blinked. Did he remember that? No. Just a phrase.

Morton motioned him forward. “Come on.”

The OmniCon executive led Robo into the main room of the precinct house. He stopped before the towering desk of Sergeant Reed.

Robo was aware that he was being followed by a small group of technicians. All eyes were upon him. He certainly seemed popular.

Reed refused to acknowledge their presence until Morton spoke up. “He needs a car.”

Reed didn’t bother to look up. He tossed a set of keys to Morton. They were heading for his forehead. Without thinking, Robo extended a hand and, in one swift motion, grabbed the keys and placed his hand down at his side. “Thank you, Sergeant Reed,” Robo said politely.

Reed stared uneasily at the hulking figure. “Anytime,” he said.

Morton pointed Robo toward the door. “Go get ’em, boy.”

Robo nodded and marched through the precinct house and out the front door. A TurboCruiser awaited him. Robo stood outside the car for a moment. A primitive means of transportation, one prone to breakdowns and not that maneuverable at high speeds. Still, it was more attractive than the other squad cars around. It seemed new and extremely shiny. The moon shone down on the hood. Not a single ding in the metal surface.

Robo climbed in the car, fired up the engines, and roared off into the night, paying strict attention to the grids on the fluttering dashboard displays. Robo guided the car down dimly lit street after street. He noted that most of the neighborhoods were in an advanced state of decay. He wondered what had brought about this ruin. And, if the place had reached this putrid state, why didn’t someone come along and just clear the area and replace it all?

He enlarged the scope of his vision, watching the road before him and the various data being displayed on the dash of the car. He passed by a street still housing several stores in operations. A frizzy-haired young man was darting up the street in an erratic manner, his overcoat badly stained. Robo made a mental note. Loss of balance. He zoomed his vision in for a closer look. Dilated pupils. Drug-related reaction. Crusted mucus about the nose. Lips dry and flaky. Weight: approximately 110 pounds. Thirty pounds less than normal for a male this height. Conclusion: condition brought about by abuse of pharmaceutical substances. Illegal variety. Likely substance of abuse? Cocaine, possibly heroin.

Robo turned the corner and considered the facts.

Tony Alvarez, aged sixty, sat behind the liquor counter of his small store and watched the TV overhead. He loved that Bixby Snyder Show. *It’s Not My Problem.* What a funny guy. He must have taken at least a dozen pies in the face every show. Bixby made a remark concerning hooters and Tony laughed out loud.

His wife, Elvira, turned from the register and watched her husband

giggle. Sixty years old and still acting like a kid. She shrugged. Oh well, every man had a little boy still inside.

When Elvira's back was turned, ten-year-old Petey Davison made his move. He extended a hand and quietly ripped off a Snickers bar. He jammed it into his jacket pocket as Elvira turned around.

"Find anything yet, Petey?"

Petey perused the candy rack. "No ma'am. Not yet."

"We'll be closing soon, Petey. Make up your mind."

"Yes ma'am." Petey grinned at her. Idiot. She had nose hairs sticking out of her snout.

Elvira smiled as the young man in the overcoat staggered into the store. He looked wasted as hell. Elvira sighed. This neighborhood certainly wasn't what it used to be. The new customer walked over to the girlie magazine rack and stared, hollow-eyed, at the badly dog-eared issues in front of him. Elvira didn't like the looks of the boy. He was shaking. His forehead was dripping with sweat.

Petey glanced over his shoulder at the dude. He smirked. Hophead. Adults were so screwed up. Maybe if the guy caused enough of a ruckus, Petey would get to swipe a second Snickers bar. He watched the man hopefully.

Elvira glanced at Tony. Tony was already watching the kid. The stranger grabbed an issue of *Anal Lesbians in Heat* and rushed over to the register. He slapped the magazine down on the counter hard. Petey looked up at the geek. His eyes were nearly pinwheeling.

Elvira maintained her smile. "Will there be anything else?"

The hophead seemed to consider this. "Yeah," he replied evenly. "Empty the register and put the money in a bag."

Elvira was puzzled. "Excuse me?"

The hophead pulled a shortened Chinese AR-56 from inside his overcoat. Seeing the shiny weapon, Petey slowly backed away. Suddenly, he lost his desire for Snickers.

The hophead snapped a spring-loaded bayonet into place on the barrel of the sawed-off gun and waved it below Elvira's nose. Tony stood beneath the blaring television set, petrified.

"Give me your money," the stranger said emphatically. "All of it. And don't fuck around."

He turned toward Tony. "Where's the safe, old man?"

Tony's lips quivered. "We—we don't have one."

Elvira began filling a paper bag with money. The stranger glared at Tony. Elvira pressed a small button inside the drawer of the register, activating a silent alarm. She hoped. It hadn't been used in five years.

The stranger spun and grabbed Petey around his neck. Petey's eyes widened as he felt the tip of the bayonet hover above his left ear. "Open the safe, pops, or I'll blow junior here all over the candy rack," the hophead commanded.

Petey closed his eyes. Jesusmaryandjoseph. If he got out of this one, he'd never steal any Snickers again. Tony seemed to sag. "Don't hurt the boy," he wheezed. "I'll open the safe."

Tony walked toward a picture of Jesus hanging behind the register. One of those 3-D portraits that winked. He pulled the picture aside and started to fumble with the combination lock on the wall safe. He was nervous. He was old. His fingers were stiff. He was afraid he'd hear Petey scream any second.

"You're stallin', old man," the hophead said. "You got to three to get that safe open. One. Two . . ."

He pushed Petey down in front of the candy rack. Elvira screamed. The hophead pulled the bolt on the rifle and aimed it at the ten-year-old boy.

Elvira let out another yell.

This time, her attention was not focused on the robber.

The hophead, seeing that Elvira was staring *over* his shoulder, spun in time to see Robo crash through the doors of the store. The robber froze.

"What the hell is that?" he blurted. It was a cop. But it wasn't a cop. It was a machine. But it looked like a man. He pointed his rifle at the cop.

Robo wasn't impressed. "We can do this one of two ways," Robo announced gently. "The easy way or the hard way."

Elvira and Tony hit the floor as the hophead let three rounds loose. "Screw you, cop."

The bullets smacked into the armor on Robo's chest and ricocheted wildly into space. Petey watched a bottle of detergent fall, mortally wounded, to the floor. A light bulb in the back of the store shattered. The selector dial on the TV spun wildly, changing the channels six times.

"Screw *me,* cop," the thief muttered.

Robo shrugged. "Okay. We do it the hard way."

He walked toward the robber. The frightened druggie opened fire again, point blank. Elvira and Tony held each other's hand as bottles of gin exploded not five feet from their heads. The blast didn't cause Robo to even break stride.

"Aggghhhhhh," the robber announced, charging toward Robo with fixed bayonet. The hophead smacked the bayonet into Robo's groin.

He pulled it back. The bayonet looked like a small concertina.

Robo took the thief's gun in one massive hand and crushed the barrel. "Now it's my turn."

Robo swung the robber's rifle like a baseball bat. The butt of the gun connected with the hophead's jaw and sent the thief flying into the back of the store. Display racks tumbled as the intruder reached a speed of twenty miles per hour before slamming, head-first, through a massive freezer case door. What was left of his head wasn't worth talking about.

Elvira and Tony slowly peeked out over the register.

Petey scrambled to his feet, staring up into the sort-of face of the supercop. "Wow," Petey exclaimed.

Robo addressed his ComLink. "Central. Requesting prisoner transport . . ."

He gazed into the back of the store. The robber was still moving. Vaguely. "And MediVac unit. 174 South Pine Street. Copy?"

"Copy," ComLink belched.

Robo turned to the two store owners. "I don't think he'll give you any more trouble."

Tony looked at the shattered form embedded in the freezer case door. "I don't think he'll give *anybody* any trouble again."

Robo placed two steely fingers to his helmet and tossed off a casual salute. He turned and marched out of the store. Petey watched him leave, wide-eyed.

Turning to Elvira, he removed the Snickers bar from his coat. "Uh, how much for this, ma'am?"

Tony put an arm around his wife. "It's on the house, Petey."

"Gee, thanks, Mr. Alvarez." Petey ran out of the store just in time to see the TurboCruiser disappear down an alley. "That guy is better than T. J. Lazer," he exclaimed.

Robo angled the TurboCruiser down the gaudy, garishly lit streets of the tenderloin district. Heavily made up hookers of both sexes slouched on lampposts near the curb. Several punks gave him the finger as he drove by. A neon sign bearing the words GIRLS! GIRLS! GIRLS! reflected off his visor.

Robo watched both the streetscum and the dash carefully. A bright blue light began flashing on the gridmap before him. Four blocks away. Without thinking, Robo hit all the switches. Sirens howled. Lights flashed red and blue. Robo stood on the gas. The turbo engines screamed to life. There was a crime happening and, according to directives one and two, that wasn't a proper thing to do in Robo's precinct.

In a dark alley four blocks away, a young woman, her blouse torn, screamed for someone, anyone, to help her as two young punks trotted after her. The skinnier, faster of the two thugs was upon her in an instant, grabbing her from behind and pawing at her half-exposed breasts. She dropped her purse, struggling to get free. The young punk let her go, eyeing the girl's torso. She turned to run and found herself in the arms of the second Cro-Magnon.

"Hey, baby," he breathed. "Take it easy. We don't want to hurt you."

The woman's lips quivered. He was only two inches away from her face. He was breathing hard. He smelled of sardines and tequila. Her head was yanked back from behind. The first punk had grabbed her hair.

He was practically drooling on it, a knife in his hand. "Way too much hair here for me. I like a girl with short hair."

The mugger in front of her held her hard. "Yeah. Me, too. Let's give her a haircut before we get . . . intimate."

The thug behind her flicked his switchblade open and slowly sliced off a large hunk of the woman's hair. In the moonlight, tears glistened down the woman's face. She was angry. Frightened. Humiliated. Before she knew what she was doing, she shot an elbow into the groin of the creep behind her and tried kneeing the boy who held her by the shoulders.

He shook her furiously, as his partner yelped in pain. "Baby, you're making me mad."

He produced a knife of his own and held it to her throat. "Don't make me mad, honey."

He laughed, watching the shimmering tears cascade down her face. He blinked. Her tears weren't shimmering anymore. In fact, the moonlight that had illuminated her face had been blotted out . . . blotted out by a large shadow.

An Olympian voice thundered across the alley. "Let the woman go! You're under arrest!"

"What the f—" The punk held on to the woman and spun his body around. Walking down the alley was the damnedest policeman the creep had ever seen. He looked like a cop. But he walked like a . . . well, a soldier or something. And his hands were as big as . . . his gun. Which was real big.

The two punks cowered together, the woman held in front of them.

Robo saw the time for talk was over. He switched from his Public Address mode to his Targeting sequence. He raised the gun.

The mugger holding the woman ducked behind her, the knife still to

her throat. Robo analyzed the situation. Calling up his targeting grids he searched for a shot that would safely miss the woman and nail her assailant.

Computerized response: there was none.

Robo kept the gun upraised. He switched his targeting mode to a computer-generated overhead graphic of the scene. Green lines and numbers flew through his brain, calculating the correct angle of firing and the proper trajectory of the bullet.

The mugger holding the girl couldn't figure this out. Why didn't the cop back down? He had a hostage. "Are you kidding me, asshole? I'll cut this bitch's neck from ear to ear."

Robo didn't reply. Swiveling his body ever so slightly, he fired a single round into the alley wall on the left. He heard the bullet ricochet high into the wall on the right. Ping. Another ricochet. Downward, now. The hostage screamed as Robo's bullet angled into the back of her assailant's head, neatly blowing his face all over the back of her blouse.

He collapsed on the ground in a dead heap, his knife clattering harmlessly on the pavement. The woman ran off to the side of the alley and hugged a wall. The remaining mugger stood, knife in hand, gaping at the cop.

Robo faced the punk. "It's your move, I believe."

The kid dropped the knife and slowly raised his hands toward the moon. Robo calmly marched up to him and placed the muzzle of his A-9 against the punk's head. Reaching behind his back, he produced a set of handcuffs. He snapped one cuff around the punk's right wrist, pulled the kid up to a street sign and, wrapping the punk's arms around the metal pole, closed the remaining cuff on the creep's left wrist.

"There," Robo said.

The woman ran up to Robo, sobbing. She threw her arms around him. Robo faced her, activating his Voice Street Analyzer. There was anger. Relief. Fear. Affection.

Affection?

"Oh, God," the woman sobbed. "Oh, God. I was so scared. How can I ever thank you enough, Officer?"

Robo gently pushed her away. "You have suffered a severe emotional shock. It's important for you to be with people you trust, ma'am. I can notify a rape crisis center, if you so desire."

Lewis and Starkweather angled their car into the alley and trained their spotlight on Robo and the woman. Lewis, at the wheel, shook her head admiringly. "He may eat batteries for breakfast, but he's a

pretty good cop. Two collars in a half hour.”

“He’s no more a cop than my blender is,” Starkweather groused. “Let’s get the hell out of here.”

Lewis backed her TurboCruiser out of the alley. She wasn’t sure whether she liked the idea of a cyborg on the force, but one thing was certain: once the word on Robo hit the street, Old Detroit would look like a new neighborhood.

[11]

Robo sat in darkness, the humming of his heart his only companion. Outside, a world went on living without him. He didn't realize this, however. Babies were being born. Grandparents were dying. Young couples were loving. Robo, however, ceased to exist when he wasn't called upon to function.

Click.

He was in the holding cell. Dr. Roosevelt was before him. "Time to roll, Robo."

Robo nodded and arose from his chair. He walked past the three technicians at the consoles and headed for the booking room. The cops didn't pay too much attention to him now. He'd been one of them for a week. They seemed to have accepted him, although he knew he was regarded as more of an appliance than a comrade. He didn't care. He wasn't programmed to care. To feel. Some resented him. Others admired him. He didn't think about it. He had directives to follow.

A thin mist clung to the ground as he walked to his car. A small gaggle of kids stood nearby. "Hey, cop!" one of them called.

He turned and analyzed the voice. Admiration. Respect. Excitement.

The boy, no more than eight years old, raised a clenched fist. "Way to go, cop."

Robo nodded. Without computing his response, he raised a clenched fist as well. The kids cheered as he got behind the wheel and drove off into the night.

A strange thing had happened during the past week. People in Old Detroit waited for him to drive by on his nightly rounds. They cheered him, especially the children. Children. Small persons. He stared ahead at both the dashboard grids and the street. A sudden, fleeting image appeared before him, lingering no more than a millisecond. A small boy and a smiling woman. He couldn't get a good look at their faces. Databank glitch, most likely. He'd tell Dr. Roosevelt about it and have it corrected before his next tour of duty.

A beep-tone focused his attention on the dash. An all-units alert flashed on the VU-screen. The Hunter Etak system pored through a series of maps of the city. A blue light flashed on the map directly over City Hall.

The voice of the dispatch gurgled over the ComLink. "Call all units.

Code Three in progress at City Hall. Suspect is armed and has taken hostages. All units in the area please respond . . .”

Robo hit the switches. The TurboCruiser burst into life, sirens and lights activated. “1-Able-44 responding,” Robo intoned.

By the time he arrived at City Hall, a small fleet of TurboCruisers and a SWAT van were scattered beyond the police line. Robo climbed slowly out of the car and surveyed the scene. A half dozen cops and a dozen SWAT team members were hunched behind their open car doors. Their guns were drawn and pointed toward a third-story window, the only window in the building illuminated.

Huge searchlights crawled across the building. Robo turned and saw several hundred spectators and dozens of reporters behind barricades a half-block away. Starkweather and Ramirez were assigned crowd control. Neither one of them was having a good time.

“There’s supercop,” Ramirez said. “I guess we can go home now.”

Starkweather clenched his jaw. “Bag of bolts. I’m filing a grievance with the union.”

“Why? ’Cause he’s too good?”

“Yeah,” Starkweather replied. “Something like that.”

Robo walked to the rear of the police contingent. A sweating SWAT team commander, too young to have any facial hair, was arguing with a police captain old enough to be his father. The SWAT man’s tag read “Lt. Hedgecock.” The captain’s name was Corman.

Hedgecock was driving home a point. “My boys can contain this situation in ten minutes. We go in with gas and plenty of firepower and we’ve got a good chance of saving the mayor.”

Corman wasn’t impressed. “He’s already killed an aide. You go in there with that kind of profile, sonny, and we’re gonna be picking up pieces of hizzoner from here to Chicago.”

Hedgecock bristled. Beads of sweat formed on his upper lip. “Yeah, well, it’s gonna look pretty bad if this joker smokes the mayor while we’re standing around jawboning about what *might* happen . . .”

Robo placed a heavy hand on the SWAT man’s shoulder. “Keep the perpetrator talking.”

Corman looked up at the sturdy cop. “But . . .”

A round of machine-gun fire burst forth from the third-floor window. Corman and Hedgecock hit the ground as the asphalt around them erupted in small cyclones of grit and debris. Robo stared at the pockmarks appearing directly in front of his feet. He drew his A-9 and walked toward the front door.

Hedgecock gaped at the marching figure. “Who the hell is that?”

“The question is *what* the hell is that?” Corman replied. The captain

shrugged and picked up his megaphone. “Okay, Miller,” he barked. “Don’t hurt the mayor and we’ll give you whatever you want.”

While Corman jabbered, Robo walked calmly up the front steps of City Hall and entered the front door. The perp, Miller, was screaming from the third-floor window. “First, don’t fuck around with me. I’m a desperate man!”

“No problem here, Miller,” Corman called back.

Robo casually walked up the stairs leading to the third floor. He emerged in a highly polished, ornate hallway. He walked down the corridor. The voices were getting louder. He came to a large wooden door marked *Mayor.* Gazing at it, he activated a command marked *thermograph.* Vague outlines appeared on the door. The door was too thick for concise imaging.

Robo passed the mayor’s office and walked to the portal leading to the office next door.

In the mayor’s office, a decidedly addled former City Councilman Ron Miller stood, poised, next to the window, a mini-Uzi trained on his three hostages. His business suit was dirty and rumpled. He hadn’t slept in days and one of his eyes twitched spasmodically as he munched on a Twinkie. He tapped his foot nervously. Plastic wrappers crinkled under his shoes. Three dozen of them. Former Twinkie containers.

Mayor Waldo Gibson crouched in the corner with his two remaining aides. His third aide, a fresh-faced kid named Eddie, was still sprawled where he fell an hour ago, his internal organs now external, thanks to Miller’s firepower. Gibson, one of the few black politicians left in Detroit, watched Miller swallow the Twinkie nearly whole. Gibson’s mouth was dry. Watching the cake crumbs cascade onto the floor only made it drier.

“I wish I had some milk,” Miller muttered. “Hey, Corman, you still out there?”

“Yeah, Miller.”

“My second demand. I want some milk. Cold milk. You got it? Not low-fat shit, either. I hate that. I want regular homogenized milk. The low-fat stuff tastes like water.”

“Fine. Milk to go. No problem.”

“Third: I want a recount in the election. And no matter how it comes out, I want my old job back. And I want a bigger office. With a refrigerator. Not a half-size refrigerator, either. A big one. Big enough to hold a lot of milk. And ice cream. And I want a new car, too. And I want the city to pay for it all.”

Corman’s voice emerged from the darkness. “What kind of car,

Miller?"

Miller thought hard. "Gimme a minute."

He turned to Gibson. "You know anything about cars?"

Gibson shook his head no.

Miller shrugged. "Me neither. I never owned a new one. Just clunkers."

He faced the window again. "Okay. I want something with reclining leather seats that goes *real* fast and gets really shitty gas mileage. Something big and heavy."

Corman considered this. "How about a 6000 SUX?"

"Well, okay. But the city has to pay for my gas and all tune-ups."

Robo crept into the office next door. He scanned the room. It looked solid enough but the walls had been altered during the 1980s. Cheap construction. Overpriced. He twirled his gun and slid it back into his holster. He didn't think he would need to use it. He walked over to the wall separating the two offices and ran a hand along it. Outside, he could hear Corman attempting to be diplomatic. "No problem, Miller. Let the mayor go and we'll throw in cruise control, white-wall tires, video games, stereo, whatever you want, buddy."

At the window next door, Miller reached down for another Twinkie. There were none to be had. He bellowed out the window, "Don't jerk me off, Captain. People jerk me off, I kill them. Wanna see?"

He walked across the room and yanked the dry-mouthed mayor to his feet, pulling him to the window. Miller pushed the mayor next to the opening and backed off toward the wall, his Uzi now poised for execution.

"Nobody ever takes me seriously," Miller screeched. "Well, let's all get serious now."

On the other side of the wall, Robo adjusted the thermograph. The picture was much clearer now. The computer-enhanced imaging showed Robo Miller's agitated form nearby. Miller's finger was beginning to squeeze the trigger of the Uzi.

"Let's all kiss the mayor's ass good-bye," Miller shrieked.

Robo pulled his right arm back and then plowed it forward into the wall. The wall exploded outward. Miller began to turn as Robo's titanic fist appeared from the ruptured wall. Robo grabbed Miller in a choke hold and pulled him closer. Miller squeezed the trigger. A spray of hot lead sizzled through the mayoral office. Gibson and his aides dove for cover as the bullets took chunks out of furniture and plaster alike.

Robo yanked fast and hard. He pulled a shrieking, kicking Miller through the wall into the next office. Miller continued to fire, his

bullets spraying into the ceiling. A shower of plaster rained down on the twosome. Miller twisted and turned in Robo's grasp. He swung the barrel of his gun up at the policeman's chin, clipping him soundly. Robo barely felt the impact.

He stared at the would-be assassin curiously and cocked his left fist. He sent it slamming into Miller's midsection. Miller doubled over. The force of the punch sent the councilman flying backward. His body smashed into the window of the office.

Miller screamed obscenities as he exploded out of the third story of City Hall and plummeted to his death below.

Robo walked through the wall leading into the mayor's office. A very shaken Waldo Gibson stood next to his desk. Robo scanned the office and made sure that the remaining hostages weren't hurt.

"I am glad you are safe," Robo announced. "I apologize for any structural damage caused during the apprehending of the suspect."

Robo nodded and walked out of the room, closing the door gently behind him. "Good night."

Mayor Gibson stared at the closed door. He glanced at the hole in the wall.

"That's some tough cop," he said. He walked forward to help his aides to their feet, crushing discarded Twinkie wrappers as he went.

Outside City Hall, Robo walked placidly toward his car. Revving up the TurboCruiser, he glanced at the crowds behind the police barricades. They were cheering. They were cheering for him.

He would have felt good about that as he drove away . . . but he didn't know how.

[12]

Jan Murphy placed the last of her late husband's clothes into a tattered cardboard box. She sat on the rumpled bedspread and stared at the ten cartons before her. Twelve years of a marriage, a lifetime of a man, sitting in containers that once housed groceries.

She smiled to herself. Murphy would have appreciated the irony. She pushed one of the boxes aside and left the bedroom. She'd been sleeping in the living room since her husband died. She couldn't stand the thought of lying alone in that bed after so many years of feeling him beside her.

The anger of his death had passed. The sorrow, the heartbreak hadn't really hit her yet. She was going through a period of numbness. She worried about Jimmy the most. He was taking it pretty hard.

She was torn as to how to handle it. If she coddled him, treated him like a rare piece of china, she'd only make the ten-year-old more aware of the loss. If she tried to get him through each day as if nothing had happened, the boy would think she didn't care, that Daddy had died for nothing. She walked a hesitant line between the two modes of behavior.

The last of their belongings were almost packed. They'd be out of the house tomorrow. The day after they'd head for the Moon Colony. UniCorp had been good about that. They processed her request as a top-priority item—Murphy being killed in the line of duty and all that. Red tape was cut. People at desks smiled and said things in understanding tones.

She walked through an empty hallway. Jimmy called out, "Hey, Mom. Get a load of this!"

She stopped, puzzled. She hadn't heard Jimmy this enthusiastic since before the accident. Accident.

She trotted into the nearly bare living room. Jimmy was sitting cross-legged in front of the TV. He was watching the news.

"Wait until you see this," he beamed.

Jan knelt next to him. Jess Perkins, her hair laminated and sparkling under the studio lights, sat, a serious look on her face, in front of a bit of news footage from the week before. Jan gaped as the body of Councilman Ron Miller exploded through a third-story window and hurtled toward the ground.

"Neat, huh?" Jimmy asked, brightly. "It gets better."

"Jimmy," Jan said. "This is a little intense, don't you think?"

"Wait."

Jess gazed into the camera, her eyeshadow just the right shade of blue. "It started a week ago with the heroic rescue of Mayor Gibson and two of his aides by a lone police officer . . . his identity a well kept secret."

The news footage switched to that of a press conference. Two OmniCon executives, a Mr. Morton and a Mr. Johnson, flanked a titanic cop; an armored warrior built like a fullback. "Yesterday," Jess continued, "OCP put an end to speculation when it unveiled an experimental crime management program. Its name: RoboCop. Today, kids at Lee Iacocca Elementary School got to meet in person what their parents only read about in comic books . . . a real superhero."

The footage dissolved into a scene at a crowded schoolyard where the Promethean armored man waded through an endless crowd of excited kids and reporters. Jan watched Jimmy grin as the giant lumbered through the crowd. She shook her head sadly. Murphy would have cringed at this media hoopla. He was a by-the-books cop. He did his job. He did it well. He didn't brag about it. Didn't complain about it.

A breathless reporter thrust a microphone in front of the Titan. "Excuse me, Robo? Any special message for all the kids watching at home?"

The figure turned and stared at the camera. "Stay out of trouble," was all he said.

The kids cheered. A commercial for Bixby Snyder's *It's Not My Problem* sitcom came on.

Jan still gazed at the screen. There was something about the mechanical cop's eyes that gave her the willies. Something half-human. Something familiar.

Jimmy sidled up to her. "Isn't he great? He's better than T. J. Lazer. This guy is for real. Do you think they'll have news about him on the moon?"

"I'm sure they will, dear," Jan replied. Those eyes looked right through her. She dismissed the feeling. She was still shaky about the accident. It had only been two months since the funeral. OmniCon had pulled out all the stops. Pipers playing "Amazing Grace," half the precinct there in full dress, classy coffin. Closed. They said Murphy had been pretty badly mangled.

She choked back a sob. Jimmy looked at her oddly. "Are you okay, Mom? Did I say something wrong?"

"No." She smiled weakly. "No. I'll just miss this old house. That's

all."

Jimmy put an arm around her. "I miss him, too."

The news returned and Jimmy waited, breathlessly, for another glimpse of his newfound hero, Robo. Instead, Casey Wong, crocodile smile in place, appeared over a graphic depicting the futuristic Delta City. "Still no official start date for OCP's Delta City Project," he intoned, trying very hard not to sound like the young wimp he was.

"Labor leaders have refused to sanction construction until OCP can guarantee the personal safety of workers in Old Detroit. Robert Morton, vice president in charge of the RoboCop Program, had this to say."

The thin, nervous man glimpsed on the podium a few moments before with RoboCop now relaxed in a sumptuous office. "Well, I can't comment on Delta City," he began, "that's not my division, but at Security Concepts, we're projecting the end of crime in Old Detroit within forty days. There's a new guy in town, and his name is . . . RoboCop."

The camera slowly moved to the right. There, sitting in the office with the executive, was the supercop. Robo stared at the camera, hard. "I am here for one purpose and one purpose only: to make the streets safe for good citizens and to put the streetscum where they belong; either behind bars or under the earth."

"Too cool," Jimmy said as Wong appeared with another story about the threat of nuclear warfare in some country Jan had never heard of. She didn't hear a word Wong said. She was still thinking of those eyes. Cold, yet passionate. Blank, yet determined. And beneath the blue visor, they *still* seemed to be blue. Very, very blue.

[13]

Morton watched, pleased, as Robo waded through yet another crowd of cheering students. Johnson viewed the scene curiously as the kids reached forward to shake the mighty policeman's hand. Johnson was quietly amazed at the popularity of the experimental model. Springtime in Detroit was not the easiest season. Even under his bulky pea jacket, he was freezing various vital organs off, yet these kids braved the cold to see their hero with no complaints at all. Yeah, Old Detroit was changing fast.

He glanced at Morton. Morton had changed over the past few weeks, too. His hair was more stylish. His clothes were new and expensive. New glasses. New brand of breath mints. The boy was definitely zooming up the corporate ladder. Yet Johnson had his doubts about all this.

There was Jones to think about.

You didn't cross a man like Jones and get away clean.

Johnson shrugged. That was Morton's problem. Morton beamed as Robo worked the crowd. "I tell you, Johnson, within a month, the name RoboCop will be synonymous with modern crime fighting. Since the press conference, OCP's phones have been ringing off the hook.

"Companies want to merchandise the shit out of Robo. Robo toys, Robo dolls, Robo suits, Robo sheets, comics, guns, games . . . even a Saturday-morning TV show. Do you realize how much money he can bring into the corporation? Not only will he be the most efficient crime deterrent in the world, he'll be the most popular."

"Uh-huh," Johnson said.

"The guy has personality," Morton continued. "Well, maybe not personality. Basically, I think he's a lug when it comes to ad-libbing it but he has this certain, uh, macho quality that people seem to respond to. He's not weak or indecisive. He says what's on his mind and says it clearly. That crack on the news? Behind bars or under the earth? I almost pissed in my pants when he said that. You should have seen the TV crew. They loved it. The guys considered it a really gutsy thing to say. And the women? They creamed over it. They reacted like he was John Wayne squared. If Robo was human he could make out like a bandit with women. Believe me. He has sex appeal."

"He *is* human," Johnson replied.

"Half-human," Morton countered. "And as long as we control his

brain, he might as well be a staple gun."

"Uh-huh," Johnson muttered.

Robo looked down at the little persons in front of him. "Hey, Robo? When I grow up can I be a cop like you?" one gap-toothed little boy asked.

"The department can always use more brave young boys," he said evenly. Noticing the disappointed face of a pig-tailed face on his left, he dutifully added, "and girls, too."

The little girl broke into a grin.

An elderly schoolteacher who resembled an Egyptian mummy wandered into the crowd. "Okay, children. We mustn't keep Mr. Robo from his work now. He has to go catch villains and you have to go back into class."

The kids uttered a collective "awwww," and reluctantly shambled off toward their school. A five-year-old boy, his face littered with freckles, turned and waved one last time. "Bye, Robo," he called.

In his hand he carried a doll. It was a miniature policeman. A tag hung from the doll's left arm. "T. J. Lazer." Robo stared as the little boy trotted off.

"Jimmy?" Robo asked.

A chilly wind whipped through the schoolyard. Soon, the place was empty. Robo heard Morton and Johnson call to him. He continued to stare at where the little boy had stood. "Jimmy?" he repeated.

There was no one to answer him. Where had he gotten that name from? Had he remembered that? No, he didn't think so. The name was not in any of his data banks.

"Robo?" Morton called again. "Get a move on. It's cold out here."

Robo nodded. "I'm on my way."

He walked slowly back toward the waiting OCP van. Two technicians held the doors open for him. He sat quietly in the back seat. Dr. Roosevelt beamed at him. "You have a lot of fans, Robo."

Robo nodded. He did not reply. Something was happening inside him. Something he didn't understand.

[14]

Robert Morton walked confidently down the corridor in the OmniCon Tower, the spring of success in his step. Single-handedly, he would make OCP the darling of both the business world and the popular press. He nodded at the half-dozen smiling executives who greeted him in the hall.

Funny how fast things could change. A couple of months ago, he was a has-been. Worse, a never-was. Then Jones blew it. Blew it in a major way. A fleeting memory of Kinney's body sprawled across the Delta City model flashed through his mind.

Screw it. The kid was a nerd. Anyway, he had died for a great cause —my career.

A young, fresh-faced executive named Walker trotted up after Morton. "Hey, hey. Bobby. Vice president. Congratulations. Handball Tuesday night?"

Morton smiled paternally at the young pup. "Love to, Bill . . . but I've got a date. Couple of models coming over to my place."

"Whew? Need company?"

"Why. You know a third model that can drop by?"

Morton paused in front of the executive washroom. Sliding a gold cardkey out of his pants, he slipped it into a slot and walked into the exclusive quarters. Walker followed him.

Inside, Morton grinned to himself as he surveyed the posh decor. Sparkling tiled floors stretched out for nearly a city block. Small, golden signs pointed the ways leading to the Jacuzzi, the shower, the gym, the racketball courts. It was an upwardly mobile executive's dream come true.

The washroom was empty but for someone using one of the stalls. Walker and Morton stepped up to two urinals. Walker babbled as he unzipped his fly. "You're making a real name for yourself in Security Concepts with RoboCop, Bobby."

Morton nodded.

"But," Walker added, "I've got to level with you. I hear Jones is plenty pissed."

"Yeah. Yeah. Yeah," Morton replied, taking aim at his urinal. "I know. The guy's got himself a killer reputation, but bottom line, it's a smokescreen. Let's face it, he's lost his teeth. The guy's a wanker."

Walker's eyes bulged. Morton was treading on thin ice. "Are we talking about the same Dick Jones here?"

Morton smirked. This kid had to learn what the new order was in the tower. "Walker, wise up. Jones is old. We're young. That's life. Survival of the fittest, right? Corporate Darwinism."

"Yeah, but . . ."

"The guy fucked up."

Walker didn't reply. He was staring directly into the mirror in front of him. The stall behind the two men opened. Dick Jones slowly walked up to the sinks and began washing his hands. Walker tensed. With the muscle control of a samurai, he stopped urinating, zipped up and headed for the door.

"Geez," he muttered. "I gotta meeting I gotta get to. Seeya."

Morton continued his business at the urinal, nervously. He watched Jones slowly dry his hands with a paper towel, crumple the towel masterfully, meaningfully, and stuff it down a dispenser. Jones turned and walked toward Morton, stopping directly behind him. He literally breathed down the young executive's neck.

"Congratulations on the promotion, Bob," Jones said, his hawklike nose practically in Morton's ear.

"Uh, thanks, Dick," Morton replied lamely.

Jones stared into the mirror, making eye contact with Morton. Morton was furiously zipping up his fly as Jones intoned, "I remember when I was a young executive at this company. I used to call the Old Man funny names. Ironbutt. Boner. Why, once I even called him an asshole."

Morton scurried to the sinks and began scrubbing furiously. Jones sauntered over to the sinks as well. "But, and this is an important point, Bob, there was always respect. I always knew where the line was drawn."

Morton reached for a towel. Jones grabbed him around his wrist. "You just stepped over the line, Bobby boy. You've insulted me, and you've insulted this company with that bastard creation of yours."

Morton gaped at Jones. Jones wasn't shouting, really. He hadn't raised his voice. It was the *tone* of his voice that was a shout. No, it was more like an insane squeal. Jones's eyes seemed to be the size of grapefruits. "I had a guaranteed military sale with ED 209. Renovation program. Spare parts for twenty-five years! No one cared if it worked or not, Bobby. No one."

Morton tried to finesse his way out of the situation. He also tried pulling his wrist away from Jones. He was successful at neither. "Well," he said. "The Old Man thought it was pretty important, Dick."

Jones released Morton's wrist. The tone of his voice grew calmer. "You know, Bobby, he's a sweet old man, and he means well. But let's face it. He's not going to live forever. And I'm number two around here, Bobby. Now that's pretty simple math, isn't it? When one is gone, you move on to two."

Taking an extreme amount of pleasure in the gesture, Jones spat directly in Morton's face. "You just fucked with the wrong guy, Bob." Jones smiled. "You'd better pray to God that your RoboCop doesn't screw up one iota. If that happens, I'll pull the plug on you both." He walked out of the bathroom, whistling.

Morton grabbed a towel and wiped the spit off his face. He trudged out of the bathroom. The confident bounce had evaporated from his step.

[15]

Robo sat in the holding cell. His eyes were closed. He was dormant. Two technicians sat idly by outside the room, glancing, every so often, at the telemetry units monitoring Robo's systems.

The technicians were clearly bored. At first, baby-sitting the cyborg was a great job. It got them out of the lab. But sitting day after day, night after night, in a rundown police station wasn't exactly heaven, either.

"Hey," one technician said, noticing a glitch in one of the readouts, "what's this?"

The second technician banged the monitoring units. "Japanese equipment."

They returned to their conversation. Inside the holding cell, Robo sat. Darkness. Humming. All was still. No thoughts. No power. Crackle. A bright white line of static engulfed his senses. A black figure darted by. Who was that? Did he remember that? No. He had no memories. Wait. Voices. Laughter. Ka-chunk. What was that noise? A shotgun. Did he remember that? Yes. Very good. But from where?

Crackle. A swirl of white light. A glimpse of a room. Square shapes. Boxes. Crates. Men above him. Next to him. Shotguns pointed at his . . . *body?*

A roar.

The feeling of flesh torn away.

Robo awoke with a start. His jaw ached from gritting his teeth. He shook his head clear as panels of indicator lights on the chair flickered to life wildly. Robo got to his feet as the two technicians watched, half-amused.

"Hey, look," one laughed. "Bucket boy's on line."

The second technician frowned. "He's not supposed to be on line. Did you activate him?"

The first technician refused to get upset. "Japanese equipment. Probably a power surge. Let's just go in and . . ."

It was too late. Robo was leaving the holding cell.

"Hey!" the first technician exclaimed. "He can't do that."

Now, it was the second technician who stifled panic. "Are you gonna tell him?"

The first man shrugged. "Naaah."

In the booking room, Dr. Roosevelt was in the midst of hitting on a rookie policewoman when Robo walked in the room. “Sure, I’m a scientist, but I do the gym three times a week.” Roosevelt grinned. “And . . . what the fuck?”

“Are you talking to me?” the policewoman asked angrily.

“No. *HIM!*”

Robo walked through the booking room and headed for the door leading out of the precinct house. Roosevelt checked his watch, realized that Robo was off his schedule and ran into the back of the station and the holding cell. The two technicians were combing through the readouts.

“How did this happen? What the hell is this?” Roosevelt squealed.

“Uh,” the first technician replied. “We were just wondering that ourselves.”

Robo slammed the front doors of the Old Detroit station open. Outside, Officers Lewis and Starkweather were escorting a handcuffed mugger up the stairs when Robo bounded down them. Lewis watched him head toward a TurboCruiser. She pushed the prisoner at Starkweather. “You book him. I’ll catch up with you later.”

Robo marched to an empty Cruiser and opened the driver’s door, a grim look of determination on his face. Something was going on. Something was churning within him. Something alien. Something very real. He felt the presence of someone behind him. Spinning, he found himself staring at a policewoman.

“Uh, hello,” the woman said. “I haven’t had a chance to introduce myself. I’m Anne Lewis.”

Robo took a step toward the woman. Lewis held her ground, staring nervously at the armored man. Robo blinked. Grids and readouts blurred his vision. He could barely make out her face. For a moment, she was every woman he had ever cared about. He blinked again. The Prime Directives appeared in his brain. Directive One: Serve the public trust. Directive two: Uphold the law. Directive Three: Protect the Innocent. Directive Four: Classified.

“Do you have a name?” Lewis asked.

He blinked again. The directives and the grids were gone. Lewis was still standing before him. “How can I help you, Officer Lewis?” Robo asked, now in control.

Lewis wasn’t sure what to say. “Oh, gee. I . . . That’s not really what I meant. Don’t you have a name?”

Robo stared at her. What was she talking about? Lewis frowned. “Come on, Murphy. It is you underneath there, right?”

Robo stepped back cautiously.

Murphy?

Lewis stared deeply into his blue eyes. “You really don’t remember me, do you?”

Robo slid into the car. “No. Excuse me. I have a job to do. Somewhere there’s a crime happening.” He gunned the TurboCruiser and sped off into the night. A few seconds later, a very frazzled Dr. Roosevelt ran up to the curb where Lewis, confused and unsure, still stood. Tyler ran out of the station, carrying sheafs of paper and stood next to his mentor.

“What did you talk to him about, Officer?”

Before Lewis could answer, a limousine squealed to a halt in front of the station.

“What the hell is going on around here?” Morton demanded.

“She was *talking* to him,” Roosevelt said, sounding like a schoolboy ratting on a cheating classmate.

“About what?” Morton demanded.

“Stuff,” Lewis shrugged.

“What kind of stuff?” Morton asked, angrily.

“Police stuff,” Lewis sneered.

“He’s a cop, isn’t he?” Sergeant Reed’s voice boomed from behind Morton. “Why shouldn’t he shoot the shit with a fellow officer?”

The young executive spun around and confronted the burly old cop. “I thought I made it clear that this project is off limits to your people!”

“As long as your project is a cop at my station, he or it can talk to anyone or anything he wants!” Reed fumed.

Morton turned to Tyler. “What the hell happened here! Have we got a glitch or what?”

Tyler stared at the reams of paper. “Well, it’s hard to be one hundred percent certain. I mean, this system was never designed to experience Detailed Somatic Response.”

“It looks like Robo had a *dream,* Mr. Morton,” Roosevelt explained.

“Shit,” Morton hissed. He faced Lewis. “What did you talk to him about?”

“Well.” Lewis shrugged. “I asked him if he had a name. He didn’t know.”

Morton’s eyes widened. He was as near hysteria as he could get. “Oh. Great. Let me make it real clear to you, lady. He doesn’t have a name. He’s got a program. Clear?”

Lewis shrugged. “Sure.”

Roosevelt was still concerned. “I say we pull him in, run a systems check, the works.”

Morton closed his eyes. Before him, his career, his status, about three million dollars of merchandising contracts and his shot at the cover of *Time* magazine was spinning down a large high-tech toilet. He growled at Roosevelt. "You want to take him off line because he had a little dream? Are you kidding me?"

"Uh," Roosevelt replied not quite scientifically.

Morton was not finished with his performance. He glowered at the old sergeant. "You're in deep shit, Reed. This goes on your record. This project doesn't concern cops. It's classified. It's OCP. An official reprimand will be on your desk tomorrow morning. Officer Lewis's discipline is your prerogative."

Reed glared at the young executive. "I think she should get a medal for even talking to that bag of bolts. Your Robo has a personality of . . . an OmniCon vice president."

Morton's face clouded. "We keep him on the streets," he ordered Roosevelt. "We maintain the schedule. I can't afford any downtime right now. Show me the readouts."

Morton, Tyler, and Roosevelt scurried back into the precinct house like frightened rodents. Lewis shrugged and flashed a half-grin at Reed. "Sorry, sarge. I screwed up."

"Forget it, kid. Morton is a serious asshole."

The older man stared at the empty Old Detroit street, in the direction Robo had taken the Cruiser. "Personally, I admire the tin bucket for thinking for himself for a change. I never saw him look like he had someplace he had to go. And he was in a hurry."

Lewis nodded. "Yeah, but where?"

[16]

Seventeen-year-old Mickey Radford wanted to be an astronaut; not just one of the guys who flew to and from the moon like some kind of space stewardess. He wanted to be a primo astronaut. He wanted to be a pilot. He had a shot, too. If he could get that Rockwell scholarship to the Norcross Academy, he'd manage to get himself out of Old Detroit and on the road to space in a hurry.

If he blew the Rockwell tests next week, he might as well forget his plans for the future. He'd wind up working in this Shell station all his life. Right now, it wasn't so bad working the graveyard shift. Most people were too scared to come out this late at night, so he wound up being more of a baby-sitter for the station instead of a pumpboy. The job gave him a quiet place to study, too.

Mickey sat in the attendant's booth, concentrating on his analytic geometry textbook. He didn't notice the mud-caked gray motorcycle roaring into the station. It was only when the driver tapped on the booth that Mickey looked up.

The feral little cycler wouldn't have distracted Mickey at all if it wasn't for the gun barrel of the Mac-10 that the guy shoved into the change slot of the booth.

"Gimme all your money, bookworm, or I'll blow your brains out," Emil sneered.

Mickey gaped at the gun barrel. Was this really happening? Jesus. He'd seen reports about self-service robberies on the news and stuff but this station? In the middle of nowhere? On a weeknight? When he had the Rockwell exams next week?

The sneer turned into a snarl. "Come on, zit-head," Emil said. "Get a move on."

Mickey quickly emptied the cash drawer into the change slide and pushed the money toward Emil. Emil glanced at the cash. Only a couple of hundred.

"Slow night," Mickey explained.

Emil trained the gun on the shaking teenager. "Now, fill it up on Number Seven."

Mickey began punching buttons for the number seven pump as Emil backed toward the bike. The numbers on the automated pump whirled down to zero. A badly rusted robotic arm inserted the gas nozzle into Emil's bike and began pumping fuel dutifully. Emil kept his eye on the

kid in the glass booth.

"I'm a good shot, punk," Emil bragged. "So don't do anything stupid. I could give you a third nostril from here."

Keeping the gun trained on the booth, he grabbed a cigarette out of a pack he kept tucked in his shirt pocket and lit it with his free hand.

Emil didn't hear the faint whine of an approaching car. He was having too much fun giving the attendant a bad time. He stood under the light provided by the Shell sign, grinning evilly. "Hey, man. What you reading in there?"

Mickey slowly held up his textbook, smiling like an idiot. Emil squinted his eyes, reading the book's title. "You a college boy or something?" he asked. "I bet you think you're pretty smart. Yeah, a regular wiseguy. You think you can outsmart a bullet?"

Emil laughed. A high-pitched wheeze.

A pair of heavily armored boots approached him.

Emil took a long drag on his cigarette. Crunch. Someone was behind him. He pivoted his torso, gun still in hand, and came face to face with RoboCop. Robo's gun was already drawn and trained on Emil's heart.

Robo stared impassively at the wiry thug. "Drop it," he commanded.

Emil's jaw flapped up and down. It was the mechanical man from the boob tube. His cigarette glided to the ground. His eyes darted wildly back and forth. There had to be a way out of this. Robo stared hard at the man. There was something about the face. About the eyes. About the way he held his gun. He dismissed the thoughts.

"Dead or alive. Either way, you're coming with me."

Emil's face lost its color. He had heard these words before. He remembered when and where. He squinted his eyes, trying to see beneath the RoboCop's armor.

He shook his head from side to side, as if recovering from a left hook. "You? *You?"*

Emil panicked, letting loose a spray of bullets. The bullets ricocheted wildly off Robo's armor. Emil squeezed the trigger of his Mac-10 a second time, sending a torrent of hot lead in Robo's direction. The thug dove behind the line of gas pumps for cover, as the rebounding bullets headed his way. Three of the gas pumps were shredded by the slugs. A feed hose burst open with a twang, sending a spray of gas onto the ground.

Mickey, in the attendant's booth, took his book and his notes and ran out the door, as far away from the pumps as he could get.

"Mister," he yelled to Robo. "You'd better split!"

Gas sprayed wildly from the ruptured pumps. Emil backed away

from Robo and toward his bike, firing wildly. Half of his rounds smashed into the remaining pumps, sending fountains of gas gushing into the air.

"Shit," he concluded, watching a small river of gas lap up and over his foot.

Robo watched both the gas and the felon. He activated his Targeting Command.

He watched Emil, behind the smashed pumps, leap onto his bike and jam it into gear. The engine roared to life. Emil gave it the gun. The bike moved some five feet when it hit a small tributary of swirling gasoline and swerved wildly. Emil screamed as the bike angled toward its side, skidding madly. He felt his pants absorb a spray of gasoline as the bike slid furiously toward the lit cigarette he had dropped moments before.

The cigarette lay, still smoldering, eighteen inches in front of Robo's foot.

The bike continued to slide toward it.

A river of gasoline rushed in the same direction.

With a Herculean effort, Emil jammed his foot on the ground and, his ankle screaming with pain, got the bike into an upright position. Miraculously, the bike hit a patch of dry asphalt and leaped forward. Emil held on for dear life, maneuvering the bike out of the path of the flooding fuel.

Robo, noticing the cigarette, placed a firm foot on the burning butt, smashing it just before a torrent of gas rushed up and over his shoe. Robo stood there silently. A second passed. He realized he had gotten to the cigarette 1.3 seconds too late.

The air around him exploded into flame.

The puddles of fuel ignited with a deafening roar, sending roaring fireballs a hundred feet in the air.

"So long, Officer," Emil cackled. His laughter eroded into rasping gasps of fear as he noticed a fireball skidding across the wet pavement, heading right for his bike. He gunned the engine, keeping the bike ten feet away from the horizontal wall of flame trailing him.

In the center of the inferno, a blackened armored figure turned and watched Emil speed away. Robo stared through the inferno, once again activating his Targeting Command. Slowly, carefully, Robo marched out of the flames. Surrounded by thick, black smoke, he peered out of the fog and locked his vectors on the fleeing punk.

Raising a still flaming arm, Robo fired his Auto-9.

Emil felt a sharp pain at the base of his elbow. He glanced down at his arm as an exit wound the size of a grapefruit appeared. He lost

control of the bike immediately and flipped onto the hard, dry macadam.

Emil felt the wound alert all his pain centers. The night sky suddenly seemed like daylight, illuminated by the conflagration at the station. A large, shadowy figure loomed above him. The being before him looked like a creature from Hades itself. He watched as two smoldering steel hands made their way down toward his neck. They grabbed his lapels and yanked him up. He felt his bladder give way. He was nearly in tears. Things were not going his way tonight.

He rose past a pair of fire-blackened legs. A charred torso. He found himself gazing into the inhuman eyes of RoboCop.

Robo activated a Record Command. He didn't know why, but this man was important to him. He wanted this down in his memory banks for retrieval. Emil was getting giddy. He was flying. Like a bird. Robo angled the man's head before his recording eyes. Full face. Left profile. Right profile. All stored on videotape.

Emil giggled into the Titan's face. "You're dead, man. You're a nightmare."

The ground beneath Robo shook as the underground storage tanks to the station exploded with a roar. Emil stared at the undead devil before him. Behind the monster cop, a titanic fireball erupted high into space. It looked to Emil as if it would reach the stars. Emil watched as the fireball blasted past the Shell sign. The sign exploded in a violent shower of sparks. One of the letters careened off into the night.

The charred monster cop loomed before Emil. Behind him, a neon sign sputtered spasmodically. HELL.

Emil grinned at the apparition.

"Who are you?" Robo demanded.

Emil shrugged and laughed. Robo realized that the diminutive thug was of no further use to him. He dropped the little man onto the ground and marched, still smoldering, to the TurboCruiser. He didn't bother to radio his report in. He figured, by now, half the neighborhood knew there was something definitely wrong at the local gas station.

He switched on the ignition of the TurboCruiser. He had found a clue to a puzzle he did not comprehend. Yet, something within him was driving him to push onward to discover . . . what? He didn't know. He just had a feeling about all this.

He tilted his head oddly.

He had a *feeling?*

[17]

Robo burst into the booking area of the Old Detroit station looking like a vision from hell. His armor was charred. His body still smoldered and reeked of gasoline. He marched past the startled cops, past the frightened prisoners and past the more-than-siightly curious Sergeant Reed.

He paused before Reed. “Records?” he asked.

Reed smiled sweetly. “CompuLab. Second corridor to your left.”

Robo marched off. “Thank you, sergeant.”

“While you’re near the locker room, you might want to try taking a shower, too. If it wouldn’t corrode you, I mean.”

Robo double-timed it down the hallway leading to the CompuLab. He spotted the glass doors and marched through them. A half dozen information loaders, bespectacled men in white short-sleeved shirts, stopped working when the charred officer strode by.

Robo approached the head clerk’s desk ominously. Cecil, the man in charge of the CompuRecords, gazed up into the blackened giant’s face. “Can I h-h-help you, sir?”

Robo glared at the little man. “No.”

He raised his hand and saw the CompuLab terminal sitting five feet behind the trembling clerk. He made a move to walk toward the machine. Cecil was on his feet, in spite of his terror. “What exactly is it you w-w-want?”

Robo brushed the squawking man aside with a flick of the wrist and continued his advance. “This is a restricted area!” Cecil bawled. “Sir? Please, sir?”

Cecil stopped abruptly when Robo raised a titanic steel fist. He turned and faced the terminal, fist raised. *Tchikk* A metallic strip appeared, protruding from his knuckles. Cecil slowly backed away as Robo lowered his fist, inserting the metallic strip into the access port of the terminal. He stared at the viewing screen before him.

The terminal fed hundreds of mug shots onto the screen. He passed them by. This was not what he wanted. Concentrating, he summoned his Playback Command. The video mug shots he had taken of the squirming Emil played back. He froze the full frontal shot, summoning up computer-enhanced vectors to re-create the face. Once the computer image was in place, Robo allowed the video of the man to fade.

Combining both the computer image in his brain and the vision of the terminal screen before him, he placed the image of Emil over the flood of mug shots streaming by. Suddenly, the parade halted. A mug shot of Emil appeared. Robo superimposed the computer graphic of this evening's thug over the old photo of Emil. A match. Robo summoned up the man's rap sheet. **EMIL DELOREAN. ATTEMPTED MURDER. ROBBERY. ARSON. ASSAULT WITH A DEADLY WEAPON. RAPE. DESTRUCTION OF PRIVATE PROPERTY. GRAND THEFT AUTO. KNOWN ASSOCIATES.**

Robo quickly was fed the rap sheets on Joe Nelson. Dougie Harris. Chan Oland. Leon Klingensmith. Clarence Boddicker.

Robo scanned the lengthy rap sheet belonging to Boddicker. Printed out, it would have taken at least three pages, single space. The latest addition . . .

SUSPECT, MURDER: DPD OFFICER A. J. MURPHY. FILE ACCESS CODE XJ05183.

Robo summoned up his Playback Command. The face of Officer Anne Lewis appeared in his brain. She was staring up at him, frowning. "Come on, Murphy. It is you under there, isn't it?"

Robo let the image fade. He turned toward the terminal, entering the file marked **XJ05183.**

A photo of a cop appeared on the screen. Young. Mid-30s. High cheekbones. Deep, steely blue eyes. Strong, thin mouth. Good-looking in a rugged way.

Very little information accompanied the photo.

MURPHY, ALEX JAMES: KILLED IN ACTION, 3128 PRIMROSE LANE, DPD ID #8788 [DECEASED] CLASSIFIED.

Robo concentrated on the screen. The face. The words. Very little information.

[DECEASED]

The word seemed to burn into his brain.

He disconnected from the terminal and marched out of the room. He passed Tyler and Roosevelt in the hall. "Uh, Robo?" Roosevelt said. "Sergeant Reed told me I could find you down here. It's not time for your shift yet, Robo."

Robo marched back out into the booking area and toward the front door. Roosevelt and Tyler trailed after him. "Uh, Robo? You really should shut down now for a while."

Robo walked out of the precinct house. Sergeant Reed sat in his elevated chair, watching the two scientists agonize over their project gone wild. He chuckled to himself. Whaddaya know, that bag of bolts had some balls after all. One thing these high-tech assholes had to

learn and learn fast. A cop is a cop is a cop, no matter what he's made of.

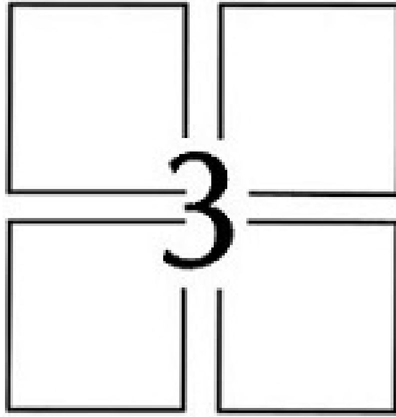
And cops don't take any shit from anybody.

At the curb, Robo fired up the TurboCruiser and screeched off into the streets of Old Detroit.

Something had taken hold of him. Something he was powerless to stop. A vision kept on swirling in his brain.

[DECEASED]

PART



Man—a being in search of meaning.

—Plato (427?-347 B.C.)

[18]

The morning sunlight reflected off the hood of the speeding TurboCruiser, sending a small rainbow of colors shimmering along the windshield. At the wheel, Robo stared vacantly at the twisting, turning streets of the city. He was out of Old Detroit now, heading for the suburbs.

He was experiencing something deep within him. A sense of loss but also of gain. He wanted something. He needed something. He just couldn't deduce exactly what it was. It was almost as if he were being guided by a higher force, a program he had not yet become aware of.

He slowed the car down as he approached the street sign reading PRIMROSE LANE. He guided the Cruiser down the block-long row of prefabricated houses. Each house was identical but for the color and the condition.

He pulled the car up in front of a weathered, beige home. 3128 Primrose. He slowly got out of the car and faced the abode. The front lawn was small and overgrown. He could sense that, at one time, it had been well kept. A FOR SALE sign was hammered into the ground haphazardly. He walked past the picket fence. The white paint was chipping off the gate.

A damp spring breeze rustled through a lone tree on the lawn. The sky darkened. The sun disappeared. It smelled like rain. Thunder rumbled far off in the distance.

Robo walked up to the front door and turned the knob. It was open. He pushed the door inward, tentatively. It felt familiar somehow.

He peered in through the darkness. The house was small but sensibly designed. Walls were covered with built-in, smart appliances. It was an ideal electronic cottage. It beat the hell out of sleeping in a holding cell.

Robo mused over that last thought. What was that? Humor? He grimaced. Humor had never occurred to him before. He must try it more often.

He took three powerful steps inside. The house lit up. Muzak filled the air. Startled, Robo turned and noticed that, near the front door, a ComUnit was positioned in the wall. A monitor. A phone. A command keypad. The monitor flickered to life and the face of a sweating, middle-aged man with a bad toupee and a frozen smile appeared on the screen. The InterSpace Network logo superimposed itself over the

smiling salesman's face. Robo watched the salesman adjust his badly made bow tie.

"Welcome, shopper," said the prerecorded spiel. "Let's take a stroll through your new home . . ."

Robo frowned and walked away. It didn't help. The voice of the salesman boomed everywhere. Robo entered the empty living room. A monitor screen in that room belched to life. "This is a one-family house built by ZM Industries. Situated near schools and shopping centers, this progressive community has a growth factor of . . ."

The voice receded into the background as Robo stared at the empty room. Something was wrong with his vision. He extended a hand and leaned against the wall as ghostly images shimmered before him. The room was now filled with furniture. A barely discernible little boy sat, cross-legged, in front of a blaring television screen. The boy. He had seen that boy before. Robo gazed at the apparition. On the ghostly TV screen, a badly made up policeman blasted a villain into bits. He then twirled his guns around and slipped them easily into his holster.

The phantom boy turned and faced Robo. "Neat, huh, Dad?"

Robo felt a rush of . . . he couldn't identify the feeling. He wanted to laugh, but he didn't know how. Tears were alien to him as well. The ghostly little boy waited for a response. With none forthcoming, he turned and faced the TV again. Quietly, the phantom room faded away. Robo was left standing against the wall of a very empty cubicle.

Confused, Robo entered the abandoned kitchen. "Honey?" he heard a female voice say. He turned and watched a phantom kitchen appear. The kitchen ComUnit began belching. "And, say, it doesn't matter who cooks in your family because this kitchen by Food Concepts makes everything a snap."

Robo stifled the urge to put his fist through the blathering monitoring screen. He stared at the kitchen table. A mirage of place settings and steaming food materialized. He stared at the microwave oven. A very pretty woman stood there, a cup of coffee in hand. "Need an extra boost before you roll, copper?" She smiled.

Robo fought back a cry of anguish. What was he feeling? Something was being hidden from him. The cry that churned deep within his chest was anything but a part of his program. It was something dark. Something primordial. Something *real.*

He staggered to a counter, reeling under the impact of this latest hallucination. He spotted a coffee cup on the counter. Was it solid or was it a product of his malfunctioning brain? He tentatively extended a charred steel hand. He wrapped two fingers around the cup and lifted it. There was writing on it. Old. Faded. *World Class Husband.*

Grief-stricken, he replaced the cup on the counter with a little too

much force. The handle broke off in his hand.

Robo walked down the hallway leading to the bedroom. A hallway monitor screen flickered. The omnipresent shill smiled at Robo, talking fast. “Short on cash? With MasterBudget financing, your earning power is your equity. We manage your income so that you can manage your life.”

“Fuck off,” Robo snarled, marching into the bedroom.

Shafts of stormy gray light streamed into the windows. Robo imagined that, on sunny days, this room must have been beautiful. Four full-length mirrors must have made it seem bigger than it actually was.

The salesman was now in the corner, blathering full-tilt. “Ah, the Master Bedroom. Functional space with a touch of elegance.”

Robo watched a queen-size bed appear. Bureaus. Flowers on an end table. The woman from the kitchen strolled in through the room, clad in a robe. “Jimmy needs new clothes for school,” she said, her voice echoing in Robo’s mind. “The Websters want us to come to their party.”

She faced Robo and smiled. God, what a beautiful smile she had. And those eyes. “Hey,” she said. “You look sexy in that shirt.”

She dropped her robe and headed into the bathroom. Robo followed. He watched the ghostly woman step into a steaming shower. The woman began to sing softly to herself. A little melody, nothing special, slightly offkey. To Robo, however, it sounded as sweet as a symphony.

Robo turned and caught a glimpse of himself in the bathroom mirror. What was he anyway? He saw the eyes peeking out from beneath his face visor. They were human. They were real. He raised a blackened steel hand. But this? What was this? Cold, unfeeling metal.

What kind of aberration was he? Flesh and blood and steel? It didn’t seem right. It didn’t seem natural. It didn’t seem . . . good.

A monitor next to the bathroom mirror zapped on. “Hey, have you thought it all over? Why not make me an offer? I’m ready to make a deal.”

“Deal with this,” Robo growled. He sent a steel fist slamming into the monitor. A shower of sparks erupted from the guts of the ComUnit. The Muzak which had followed him throughout the house sputtered to a stop. The lights in the house dimmed and then went out.

Robo walked through the house of dreams and headed for the front door. A wave of sounds flooded his mind. The woman singing. The TV blaring. The little boy laughing. Coffee percolating. A phone. A kiss. A

sigh.

Robo ran out the front door and found himself staring up into an angry sky. Rain began to fall in sheets. The sky rumbled. Lightning crackled. Bolts flew through space in rapid succession. Robo theorized that they were affecting his circuitry. He was beginning to hallucinate again.

A flash of lightning. The face of little Emil from the gas station. Another flash. There was Joe. Another bolt. Chan. And another. Leon. And another. Clarence Boddicker. Robo raised his arms in a cross before him, to ward off the wind and the howling banshees dancing across the sky. Suddenly, he was staring at a cross in a cemetery. He heard sobbing. He squinted at the cross. There were words on its base.

ALEX MURPHY: BELOVED HUSBAND AND FATHER, RIP.

“What do you want from me?” he whispered into the swirling rain. He heard the faint echo of distant sobbing. The woman and the boy. The ghosts.

Robo emitted a guttural noise, the sound of an animal in pain, and dashed for the car.

He sat behind the wheel and shook. And, when he was done, he shook some more.

[19]

Robert Morton, executive on the rise, let the spring storm vent its fury outside his swank apartment windows. It had rained all day but that certainly didn't dampen his spirits. A Muzak samba played in the background as Morton boogied over to the couch in front of his chrome and glass coffee table. He glanced out at the balcony where Tawny, a delicious blond model stood, the breeze whipping her long mane into a graceful swirl.

He chuckled to himself. Life was good. No. Life was fucking *great.*

He sat down on the couch next to Chandra, an exotic model companion of Tawny's, and raised the coke spoon to his nose. Sniff. Wham. Hello, world.

Chandra giggled. "There's something about the way it sounds," she cooed. "Vice president. It just turns me on."

Chandra did a line of coke. Morton watched her eyes roll back slightly. Bingo.

He scooped up some coke in his spoon and sambaed onto the balcony. "Spring storm," he said. "I love the rain. Want a toot?"

Tawny nodded, her blue eyes shimmering in the white flashes of lightning around them. "It's one of the things I like to do."

Morton raised the spoon to her nose. A small trickle of cocaine dribbled down onto her chest. Morton smiled. "What do you think of this," he muttered, lowering his face and burying his tongue between her ample breasts. "Do you like this?"

Chandra's laughter interrupted him. He turned to see the raven-haired beauty pouting. "Save some for me, Bob."

Morton laughed and flicked his tongue. "I have plenty for you both."

The doorbell rang. Morton glanced inside the high-tech abode. "Must be the champagne."

Morton danced to the front door and swung it open with a flourish. The smile evaporated from his face as the barrel of a gun appeared outside.

"Inside," the voice from the hall ordered.

Morton stumbled into the room, the gun still pointed at his face. Chandra and Tawny glided in from the balcony. The killer took note of their presence but didn't really look in their direction. "Okay, sluts.

Take a hike."

Chandra and Tawny gathered their things and scurried toward the door. Tawny took one last look at a very petrified Morton. "Good-bye, Bobby. Call me sometime, okay?"

Morton didn't reply. The gunman slammed the door behind him. "Back up, wonderboy."

Morton tried to summon up every macho bit of posturing he had ever witnessed. "Whatever it is you want, you won't get away with it. Don't you know who I am?"

By way of response, the gunman chuckled and fired four quick rounds into Morton's legs. The young executive went down, howling. His ruptured legs pumped blood onto the thick, white pile carpet. In spite of the pain, the horror, the terror, Morton had time to figure how expensive it would be to get the stains out of the rug. Hell. He might as well spring for a whole new carpet.

He looked up into the killer's cold eyes. He began to whimper. "I can't believe this is happening," he whined.

"Believe it, golden boy," the killer replied.

Morton began crawling around on the floor like a stuck pig. He made a large circular pass as the killer stepped over him. The killer produced a mini-TV and placed it on the coffee table. "Come here, asshole. I want you to watch something."

Morton crawled toward the coffee table while the hitman snorted some coke and lit a cigarette, very casually. Humbled and in pain, Morton knelt before the gunman. "I'll give you anything. Anything you want. Please don't kill me . . ."

The killer pointed his gun at the tiny TV. "Show's starting."

Morton gaped at the Sony Watchman TV as Dick Jones's face appeared on the tiny screen. "Hello again, Bobby boy." Jones smiled. "Dick Jones here in a custom made broadcast designed just for you. How about that? A young executive with a TV show dedicated to him. Feeling important?

"Hey, I bet you're on your knees right now. Probably begging for your life. Pretty pathetic, eh?"

Jones chuckled. "I bet you don't feel so cocky now, do you, Bobby?"

Morton continued to gaze at the screen. Jones was crazy. He had to be. His legs began to shake. So what else was new? He watched, dumbfounded, as his Siamese cat wandered over to the gunman, rubbing itself against the hitman's legs. The gunman reached down and scratched the cat's ears. The cat purred. Morton was repelled. Traitor. Not only had he been gunned down by a goon but now his cat was in heat for the guy.

Jones continued to talk cheerfully. “You know what the real tragedy is here, don’t you, Bob? We could have been friends. Teammates. The Batman and Robin of OCP. But you didn’t want to go through proper channels. You went over my head. Gosh, that hurt, Bobby.”

The killer reached into his flak jacket and produced a hand grenade. He placed it on the coffee table with a resounding “clink.”

Morton stared at the grenade and began to chant a mantra of sheer terror. “No,” he muttered. “No, no, no, no, no . . .”

“But life goes on,” Jones said philosophically. “It’s an old story. The fight for love and glory, right, Bobby? It helps if you think of it as a game. A big game. Every game has a winner and a loser. Tonight, Bob, you lose.”

The killer put out his cigarette, stood, and, bending over the table, pulled the pin out of the grenade. Morton began to crawl frantically toward the coffee table. The killer laughed softly and delivered a quick and violent kick into the small of Morton’s back. Morton screeched and went tumbling away from the table.

Clarence Boddicker laughed and kicked Morton a second time. “For good measure,” he said evenly.

He walked toward the door. Morton pulled himself up and, once again, moved for the table. Boddicker didn’t care. There was no way this guy would survive. Boddicker stepped into the hallway. He hesitated for a moment.

“Pusspusspuss,” he whispered.

Morton’s Siamese cat trotted out of the apartment and into the corridor. “Good kitty,” Boddicker said.

He glanced inside before slamming the door. Morton was extending a shaky hand toward the grenade. Boddicker reached down and picked up the cat. “Let’s you and me get something to eat,” he whispered.

The cat purred.

Boddicker strolled toward the fire exit stairs, humming “This Could Be the Start of Something Big.”

He stepped into the stairwell. Behind him, an apartment door flew off its hinges as a powerful fist of fire, smoke, and debris slammed through the corridor.

[20]

A fine drizzle fell on the streets of Old Detroit. The street-lamps reflecting off the shiny macadam made the area seem almost clean and bright. Robo sat silently in the TurboCruiser. He stared at the pimps, the hookers, and the drug dealers slithering through the tenderloin district.

He hadn't checked into the precinct all day. He figured, at this point, he didn't have to. If Roosevelt and Tyler were going to rein him in they would have already attempted it by now. He was their special project, wasn't he? He rationalized that to try to yank him in off the streets would be a bad public relations move. A good idea gone bad at OCP.

He raised his steel hand and made a fist. The input strip on his knuckles popped out. He inserted the strip into the Cruiser's portable crime computer access port and concentrated. He fed the computer the names of Leon Klingensmith, Joe Nelson, Chan Oland, and Clarence Boddicker. The computer whirred and produced several print-outs of their rap sheets as well as three new eight by ten photos.

Robo took the photos and hit the streets. He collared a few pimps and a few hookers, showing them the photos. Always, the answer was the same. "Ain't seen them, man."

"No way."

"Uh-uh. They're complete strangers to yours truly."

Robo walked down the street, an angry, half-charred Titan. Walking by an alleyway, he spotted a teenage gang stripping a car. He knew it was a stolen vehicle. It didn't much bother him. He pulled his gun from its holster and pointed it at the punks.

"Freeze," he commanded, his voice booming through the alley.

The kids spun and recognized Robo right away. "Let's split," one pimply-faced kid whispered.

"Are you kidding?" the other replied. "That's the RoboCop. He'll split you in two."

"Damn," the first one replied as Robo marched into the alley. He stared at the gang members hard. They dropped the auto parts. "Up against the wall, hands above your head, legs spread."

The kids did as they were told. Robo surveyed the car. "I assume this isn't part of auto shop homework," he commented.

The kids shook their heads no.

“Fine,” Robo said. “I think we understand each other. I’m not here to bust you for trafficking in stolen goods. I’m here for some information. Have any of you seen any of these guys?”

He walked by each of the frightened gang members, flashing the three eight by tens. The first nine gang members blurted “nosir” even before their eyes could make contact with the photos. The tenth member, however, hesitated before shaking his head back and forth.

Robo placed a powerful knee against the boy’s spine. The boy slid to the ground. “I ain’t seen any of them. Really.”

Robo noticed that the boy’s eyes had seemed to linger on the photo of Chan. “You haven’t, eh?” he asked.

He flashed the photo of Chan again. “You’re positive?”

“Yeah. I’m pretty positive all right. They’re all strangers.”

Robo picked the boy up by his collar and held him high above his head. The boy wriggled helplessly in the steel hand. “Lemme go, man. You’re depriving me of my rights.”

Robo slammed the boy against the wall and held him fast. “I can deprive you of a lot more.” He shrugged.

“I don’t know the dude.”

“Now, why don’t I believe you,” Robo said. “You’ll notice that my hands are made of steel.”

He carried the boy above his head to the derelict car. Placing the three photos on the car’s hood, he took his free hand and slammed it into the hood of the car. His fist pierced the car’s metal frame as if it were made of cardboard. He then carried the boy back to the wall and, once again, pinned him against the brick surface.

“Imagine what a hand like this can do to someone’s neck,” he whispered.

The boy shook his head. “Oh yeah. I remember that dude. His name is Chan. Chan Oland.”

Robo smiled. “You wouldn’t know where I could find him, would you?”

Not only did the boy remember where Chan was located, but he proved positively scholarly on every nefarious hobby Chan was into at the moment . . . including cop killing.

Robo thanked the boy, grabbed the photos, and headed back toward the TurboCruiser. Before leaving the alleyway, he turned to the frightened gang members. “Don’t worry,” he reassured them. “This is our little secret.”

Chan Oland sat smoking a joint in the rock shop. He was posted as guard but he knew there'd be no trouble. None of the cops in the neighborhood knew about the place and the locals were too scared to tip them off.

The joint used to be a supermarket. Now it was the biggest drug processing lab in the city. The floor-to-ceiling windows had been painted out and an ingeniously crafted pharmaceutical assembly line now stretched across the area where, once, dozens of market aisles had been. A half-dozen workers wearing protective masks worked under the piss-yellow fluorescent lights; grinding, sifting, and bottling cocaine. Chan glanced outside the front entranceway. The street was empty.

He nodded at the shotgun-toting guards marching on the catwalks high above him. His nod was the all-clear sign. No problem.

He inhaled deeply, getting a noseful of the loose coke dust.

Clarence Boddicker walked by with Sal Luccione, the operator of the establishment. Sal was flanked by two bodyguards of the neo-simian persuasion. Clarence was trailed by Leon and Joe. Sal and Clarence were in the middle of a disagreement. Chan didn't pay too much attention to the verbal sparring. Sal was a weasel. Clarence could eat him for breakfast if he wanted to. Sal was one of those sleazeballs who dressed the part. Pants too short. White socks. Pencil-thin mustache. Forehead always sweaty. It was hard to tell when the guy was upset or happy. He blinked a lot.

"I don't give a shit what you wanna pay, Clarence," Sal was sputtering. "I set the price in this town."

Clarence removed his sunglasses and smiled at the sniveling coke baron. "Listen, Salvador. Maybe you haven't heard. I'm the guy in Old Detroit. You want space in my marketplace? You're going to have to give me a volume discount."

Sal wasn't interested in Clarence's view of economics. "Lemme put things in perspective here, Boddicker. You killed a buncha cops. Fine. Everybody has to let off steam once inna while. Word on the street has it that you got big connections downtown. That's fine, too. A guy gotta have friends.

"But here's your big weakness, pal. You got no friends here. In fact, you got a lot of enemies. You make people nervous. A lot of folks would love to see a guy like me put you outta business."

Clarence smiled at the weasel, the smile a superior nun flashes at a snotty first-grade student. "I run the sales organization in Old Detroit, Salvador."

"People call me Sal."

"I call you a dumb wop son of a bitch," Clarence said evenly. "I can

keep the streets dry long enough to put you back in the olive oil business."

Sal's face turned crimson. He faced one of his King Kong-sized companions. "Frankie!" he screamed. "Blow this cocksucker's head off."

Frankie nodded and drew a .357 Magnum from his pocket. Chan slipped from behind an assembly line, shotgun cocked. He slid the barrel under Sal's chin. Frankie froze. All the workers imitated Frankie, staring at the confrontation in the making. Chan grinned at Frankie. Frankie gawked at Sal. Sal stared wide-eyed at the shotgun pressing against his Adam's apple.

Clarence patted Sal gently on the cheek. "Sal, baby. The Tigers are playing tonight and I never miss a game. Do you think we could interface on this? Reach a solution in, let's say, five minutes?"

Sal gulped. "Sure, Clarence. I think we can get together on a reasonable price."

Chan held the shotgun firmly on Sal's neck. His back was to the entranceway. He didn't notice the two massive steel doors flexing inward. With a tremendous clang, the doors burst in, torn from their hinges. The mobsters and their goons spun around as one as Robo trained his A-9 on them. "Hello, boys," he said.

Chan pivoted, training his shotgun on the intruder. Frankie leveled his Magnum. All the workers in the factory scrambled for their heavy assortment of automatic weaponry, ranging from Uzis to Heckler and Koch HK 92s, guns strong enough to blow the side off a moving auto at a hundred yards. On the catwalk, the two guards cocked their guns and aimed downward.

Robo didn't flinch. "Come quietly or there'll be trouble."

The mobsters glanced at each other, bewildered. Robo zeroed in on their positions, flipping his body into Combat Mode. He scanned the interior of the factory. The printout **15 TARGETS . . . 9 SHOTS [FULL]** superimposed itself over the scene in Robo's eyes.

The thugs regained their composure. Leon was the first to act. He raised his shotgun.

"Fuck you, bucket head," he offered, firing a round at Robo.

Leon's shot signaled a release of dozens of rounds. Every fool with a gun opened fire on RoboCop. Clarence hit the ground, rolling under a table as the wild firing continued. Robo stood his ground. Bullets and buckshot glanced harmlessly off his armor. He raised a mighty forearm to deflect a .357 shot aimed at his face. All the while, he calmly fired his A-9 into the crowd, picking off one after another of the rock house workers.

Chan bellowed, pumping his shotgun at the cop. Robo tilted his head and smiled. He squeezed the trigger of the A-9, sending a well-aimed bullet into Chan's forehead. The top of the thug's skull blew away as he tumbled, spewing blood and bits of semi-solid matter into the lap of a screaming Sal.

Leon ran for cover. Frankie gritted his teeth and fired his Magnum fiercely. One of Robo's bullets slammed into Frankie's teeth, shattering them and exiting through the back of his head. Sal's other bodyguard took a slug in the arm. Yelping, he dropped his weapon and ran for cover, trotting directly into the path of a volley of bullets fired by the factory workers behind him.

Joe, glancing at the body of Chan, grabbed his .45 and fired six shots at Robo, holding the gun in two-handed combat style. Robo smirked and sent a bullet slamming into Joe's right hand. Joe screamed as two of his fingers blew to pieces. The force of the impact sent his .45 sailing off into space.

Leon dove across a conveyor belt filled with bottles of coke and dragged Joe through a fire door to safety. Two lab workers, standing next to each other, were hit by a single slug. They fell, mortally wounded, onto a pile of white powder.

An alarm bell clanged to life. Sal's henchmen began to scatter. Robo stood his ground. He flipped his vision into Targeting Mode. The printout appeared in his brain, **`TARGETS: 10, 9, 8 . . . 2 SHOTS REMAINING . . . [RELOAD]`**. He fired the remaining two bullets, **`TARGETS 7, 6 . . . NO SHOTS REMAINING.`**

Robo decided that it was time to enter the factory in earnest. He marched into the maelstrom of sizzling lead and cocaine dust. Sal attempted to run by him. Robo extended a mighty left hand and caught the drug kingpin by the neck. Reaching back like an Olympian athlete, Robo hurled the screaming man, javelin style. Sal sailed, headfirst, into four of his firing henchmen.

Robo calmly ejected the spent clip from his gun and reloaded.

The remaining lab workers hunkered down behind a counter filled with bottles of coke. They opened fire, once more, on Robo.

Robo returned to Combat Mode. **`7 SHOTS REMAINING.`** He calmly picked off two of the lab workers. He then noticed plumes of cocaine exploding around his feet. He directed his gaze upward. Two guards on the catwalk were firing their shotguns at him. Robo stared at the men high above him and tilted his head. Vectors appeared before them in Robo's vision, suggesting the best possible angles of fire.

Robo fired once, spun around and fired a second time. A guard fell to his death, landing two feet before Robo, a bright red splotch on his

chest. The second guard, bleeding from the eye, began to tumble down off the catwalk. His foot, however, slammed into a loose plank, wedging itself tightly. The guard, dying slowly, found himself dangling by one foot high above the factory.

Robo watched him spin. He sensed a movement two feet away. He spun, training his A-9 on the source of the movement: Clarence Boddicker. Boddicker smiled and, remarkably quickly for a human, pulled a grenade out of his flak jacket and yanked out the pin.

Robo kept his gun pointed at Clarence's midsection. Clarence grinned, feeling he had the upper hand. "Cool it, Tinkertoy, or I turn this room into a meat locker."

Robo stared at Boddicker. Clarence saw that there was no fear in the officer's eyes. For a split second, Boddicker felt that he was gazing at the meanest cop that ever lived. He gaped at Robo and, then, at the muzzle of the A-9. Robo clenched his teeth and stepped closer.

Clarence attempted a sneer. "I mean it, man. Back off."

Robo smiled slightly. In one, smooth action, he swung his free hand up, caught Clarence by the scrotum and lifted him high into the air. Robo's hand continued its arc before letting go. Clarence soared wildly into the air, letting the hand grenade tumble loose. Boddicker crashed through a painted floor-to-ceiling supermarket window, sending countless shards of glass spinning in space.

Another window blew in when the wild grenade landed and went off outside the rock lab.

Robo twirled his gun, T. J. Lazer-style, and slipped it back into his holster. He marched across what remained of the rock house and crunched through the remains of the fractured window. He found Clarence, bleeding but not badly injured, lying in a garbage heap outside.

Clarence stared at Robo. "Let me save us both a lot of time, Tin Man. Put me in jail and I'll be out in minutes. I'm in business with the guys at Omni . . . hey!"

Robo, not really wanting a prolonged conversation, lifted Clarence high in the air and aimed him at a window that was still intact. He calmly hurled the babbling killer through a second towering pane of glass.

Clarence tumbled back into the rock house, landing between two tattered bodies that once had been part of Sal's ad-hoc science squad. Clarence stared at the ceiling. A steady drip, drip, dripping of blood drooled across his forehead. Above him, the dead guard still swung gracefully by one foot.

Robo appeared above Clarence. He leaned over him and whispered, "Clarence Boddicker. You're under arrest."

He snapped handcuffs on the man's bleeding hands. "You have the right to remain silent. You have the right to an attorney."

Clarence laughed in the big goof's face. "Listen, chromedome. I know the guy you work for. We're buddies. I could make life easy for you. Save you the embarrassment."

Clarence screamed as Robo yanked him off the floor and hoisted him to his feet by his handcuffs. "Anything you say can and will be held against you in a court of law."

Robo glared at the killer. He squinted his eyes, locking into Record Mode. Clarence stared wide-eyed at the Titan. "Come on, man. I'm trying to do you a favor. I work for Dick Jones. The big poobah at OCP? You can call him. I have his card. Wise up, trashcan. Jones is the number two guy at OmniCon."

Robo seemed to look through the man. Over Clarence's face appeared the computer graphic: **VOICE/STRESS ANALYSIS: 93% TRUTH PROBABILITY.**

Robo remained silent as he dragged Boddicker out of the lab and toward the awaiting TurboCruiser. His brain was working overtime. None of this was making sense . . . yet.

Clarence was yelling, all traces of composure gone, as Robo tossed him into the Cruiser. "Don't you get it, asshole? OmniCon runs the cops. *You're* a cop."

Robo sat behind the wheel. "Yeah. I'm a cop. A good cop."

He gunned the gas and sent the TurboCruiser hurtling forward. "Damn," Clarence muttered. "You just opened one fucking el grande can of worms, my metal man."

Robo nodded. That was possible. But if he had, he'd find a way to slam that lid shut again.

[21]

Sergeant Reed sat at his desk and glared at Starkweather and Ramirez. “You’re out of your minds.”

Lewis sat on a desk behind the two protesting cops and watched it go down. Tempers were hot. Nerves were on edge. Things weren’t too peachy in the Old Detroit station house.

“I don’t like it any more than you do, sarge,” Starkweather said. “But listen . . .”

Reed slammed his hand on his desk. “You listen to me, asshole. You’re talking about shutting down a major metropolitan police force. Without cops, this city will tear itself apart!”

Ramirez spoke. His voice was calm, even, and firm. “I’m the shop steward, sarge. I gotta tell you. The union thinks you should know that there was a strike vote last night . . .”

Reed looked up. The room was now filled with cops, filing in slowly from the locker room. Reed stared at the face of one man. The cop looked down at his shoes. The sergeant slowly gazed at all the faces of the police officers. None of them returned his look.

“We’re getting creamed out there, sarge,” Starkweather said. “It’s like a shooting gallery. Since OmniCon took over, we’re like sitting ducks. Layoffs. Bad communications. MediVacs showing up a half hour late. We’re dead meat as soon as we leave the station.”

Reed stared at his knuckles. He couldn’t argue with Starkweather about that. The mortality rate was up in the force and the morale was down. It was open season out there for cops. OmniCon didn’t seem to be backing them up at all.

The room was silent for a prolonged second. The silence was shattered by the sound of the front door bursting open. RoboCop marched into the room, dragging battered Boddicker behind. Robo slammed Boddicker against Reed’s desk. Clarence snarled silently.

Robo nodded up at Reed. “Book him. He’s a cop killer.”

Robo turned and marched out of the precinct. Lewis ran to the door and saw Robo pull away in the TurboCruiser. She shook her head, bewildered, and turned her attention to the bleeding man before Reed’s desk. The cops in the room regarded Boddicker with a mixture of awe and anger. Clarence glared at them. “What the fuck are you looking at? Just give me my phone call, all right? I want out of this dump.”

In the TurboCruiser, Robo headed out of Old Detroit and guided the car into the modern section of town. Over the swirling streets before him, he superimposed his Playback Mode. He saw Clarence's triumphant face over and over again as he declared: "I work for Dick Jones. The big poobah at OCP? You can call him. I have his card. Wise up, trashcan. Jones is the number two guy at OmniCon."

With Clarence's voice echoing in his brain, the thug's face appearing on a never-ending memory loop before his eyes, Robo pressed down on the accelerator. Hard.

In the OCP Tower, Jones paced nervously around his desk, talking rapidly into his phone. "Yes. Yes. Yes," he snapped. "I understand. I know our deal, but you let me down. In a big way. I want you to remember that. You owe me."

He slammed the phone down and sank into his thronelike chair behind his desk. Absentmindedly, he began drumming his well-manicured fingers on the desk top. "Shit," he muttered. "This is turning into Frankenstein theater."

He slid open the top desk drawer and pulled out a small CompuMap. He activated the map and watched a tiny red blip move closer to the tower.

RoboCop was approaching. Jones shook his head and sighed. It was going to be one of those nights.

"You want to play supercop?" Jones mused. "Okay. We'll play. But by my rules."

Outside the Tower, the TurboCruiser fishtailed to a halt. Robo stepped out of the car, slammed the door, and marched toward the front entrance. He entered the two large glass doors, pushed his way past a gaggle of tired executives, and strode toward the elevator.

He stood stiffly at the elevator bay. He pushed the button. After a minute, the glass elevator descended, filled with startled clerks and secretaries. They skittered nervously around the charred Titan as he stepped into the elevator. He slammed his finger onto the square button for the 112th floor, nearly sending it through the elevator wall.

The lift rumbled to a stop on the 112th level. Robo exited angrily and walked down an empty corridor. He paused before a door marked DICK JONES, SENIOR PRESIDENT—SECURITY CONCEPTS DIVISION. Without hesitating, he swung the door open wide.

The reception area was empty and dark. Light shone from under an adjacent door marked PRIVATE.

Robo opened the door and entered the room.

A lone desk lamp illuminated the room. Dick Jones was sitting behind his desk, staring out at the lights of the city far below. A drink

was in his hand.

"Come in, Officer." He smiled. "You know, I don't usually see anyone without an appointment. But in your case, I'll make an exception."

Robo marched forward, his hand hovering near the handcuffs looped on his belt. "You're under arrest," he announced in a monotone.

"Oh," Jones said, feigning surprise. "What's the charge?"

"Aiding and abetting a known felon."

"Dear me," Jones exclaimed. "Sounds like I'm in a lot of trouble. Well, golly. You'd better just haul me in."

Robo reached down for the handcuffs. Panic took hold of his brain. Something was wrong. He wasn't functioning. He pushed his hand toward the cuffs. It wouldn't budge. His entire arm had gone dead, locked in place.

Robo shook his head. He heard Jones laughing softly. Robo blinked. The Prime Directives appeared suspended before his eyes. **DIRECTIVE ONE: SERVE THE PUBLIC TRUST. DIRECTIVE TWO: UPHOLD THE LAW. DIRECTIVE THREE: PROTECT THE INNOCENT. DIRECTIVE FOUR: [CLASSIFIED].**

Directive four began to flash in his mind. A series of wild grids and access codes zipped across his field of vision. **DIRECTIVE THREE: OCP PRODUCT ID #943054-SC.**

More access codes flashed by his mind's eye. Soon, the fourth directive was revealed.

DIRECTIVE FOUR: AN OCP PRODUCT SHALL NOT ACT AGAINST OCP'S BEST INTERESTS—AN OCP PRODUCT SHALL NOT ACT AGAINST ANY SENIOR OCP OFFICIAL—AN OCP PRODUCT SHALL NOT ACT AGAINST OCP'S BEST INTERESTS—

Robo felt his knees buckle. His senses were swimming. His arms went limp. He struggled to maintain his balance. It was useless. He was slowly being drained of all his power.

"Why, what's the matter, Officer?" Jones asked sweetly.

Robo remained on his feet, watching the room spin around him.

Jones took a sip of his drink. "I'll tell you what's the matter, son. It's a little insurance policy called Directive Four. My little contribution to your psychological profile. Any attempt to arrest a senior officer of OCP results in a shutdown. Awwww."

Directive Four continued to bore itself into Robo's brain as, system by system, he began to shut down. An avalanche of warning lights swam by his eyes. Data whizzed through his fading memory, wild and out of control. Robo slowly drifted down onto his knees. He was losing

his sight. There was a video breakdown in his lenses. The room was crackling with horizontal and vertical lines. Jones moved from behind his desk and stared down at the quivering android.

"What did you think, twerp? Did you think you were an ordinary policeman? Just one of the guys? You're *our* product. We *own* your ass, batteries included. We can't very well have our products turning against us, can we?"

Summoning up every ounce of willpower he had left in his shell, Robo groped for his gun, resembling a drunken soldier on leave. He pulled it clear from its holster. Then, he lost the use of his fingers. He dropped it.

Jones was amused. "Ahhh. There's still a little fight left in you. Hmmm. Maybe it's about time you met a very good friend of mine."

Jones walked over to his desk and punched four console buttons. The lights in the room came on. A wall panel behind Jones opened. The gargantuan form of ED 209 appeared. The towering fighting machine cocked both of its arms into firing position. Jones patted ED on the knee.

"This is my buddy, ED. He doesn't like strangers."

ED lumbered around the desk and headed toward Robo. Jones sat on the edge of his desk. "I had to kill Bob Morton because he made a mistake. You. Now, I think it's about time I erased the mistake. Ed, baby, say the words I want to hear."

Jones raised his drink to his lips as ED 209 focused its attention on Robo's shaking shell. "You are trespassing on private property . . ."

Robo barely heard the words of the lumbering killing machine. ED's cannon volley hit Robo straight in the chest. The concussion blew Robo back toward the door marked PRIVATE. The door splintered on impact and Robo found himself tumbling, limply, through the reception area.

Robo felt his visor crack. For the first time, he was seeing without the benefit of the computer-enhanced visor. But through only one eye. That was it. He had an eye. A human eye. It was still functioning. He blinked his good eye and watched ED 209 smash through the remainder of the door. Robo struggled to get to his feet. It was no use. ED 209 used one of his cannon arms like a massive club. The blow caught Robo on the side of the head. He flew through the doors leading to the hallway.

He careened into the corridor wall opposite Jones's office. Things within his body were starting to quiver. He was summoning some old, untapped strength. Goddamn it. If he had a human eye, he had to have some other human attributes. Some human strength. Dredge it up, man, he screamed to his sputtering brain. Make the connections.

Connections to what?

To the past!

But he had no past . . . at least not that he knew of! He concentrated, trying to dredge up specifics. It was impossible. He was done for. No, damn it. There was something in him, a spirit he did not yet recognize, but one that he welcomed.

He devoted all his consciousness into raising it.

ED 209 crashed through the wall and emerged in the hallway. He raised the cannon muzzle, executioner style, and brought it to within inches of Robo's face. "I am now authorized to use deadly force," ED 209 commented.

Something inside Robo snapped. He slammed his fist against the extended cannon muzzle as hard as possible the second ED began to fire. ED's arm swung across his own torso. The muzzle clanged against ED's other arm as the shell exited. There was the sound of shattered metal and the smell of burnt circuitry as ED 209 blew his own arm off.

ED 209 stood, puzzled, in the corridor. He examined his own smoking stump as Robo struggled to his feet. Cradling his injured head with one hand, Robo staggered down the hall.

ED 209, spotting the movement, pivoted casually and, leveling his one remaining cannon arm, fired a heat-seeking miniature smart rocket from the launch tube situated next to his machine-gun attachment.

Robo continued to stagger down the hall. Sensing danger, he glanced over his shoulder and saw the smart rocket scream down the corridor toward him.

Robo darted around a wall, hobbling as fast as his weakened legs would carry him. The rocket screeched around the corner as well, still targeted on its prey. Taking a big chance, Robo hesitated until the rocket was almost upon him and then dove, head-first, on the thickly carpeted hallway. The rocket slammed into a wall, sending a chunk of the 112th floor into low orbit.

Glass, concrete, plaster, and various wads of office furniture tumbled down to the ground, crushing a dozen cars in the parking lot far below.

Robo found himself covered by half a wall. He slowly crawled along the floor. He saw two titanic feet begin to smash through the debris. Robo squinted his human eye. This definitely was not a great place to be.

ED 209 began wading through the debris in search of RoboCop. From out of nowhere leaped the badly damaged RoboCop. He landed on the hunchbacked robot's hood, his added weight forcing the

already top-heavy robot down. ED 209 fired a cannon volley, successfully blowing out a portion of the floor and neatly rearranging half of the office space on the 111th floor.

Robo wheeled backward, dizzily, and plunged headfirst through a doorway marked FIRE STAIRS.

In his office, suspecting the worst, Jones barked orders into his phone. "Just get Lieutenant Hedgecock down here. There's trouble at the Tower. We have a rogue prototype down here, ripping the place apart."

Robo staggered down the stairway, his body leaking precious fluids. A shadow blotted out the light above him. He glanced over his shoulder. ED 209 was, once again, on his trail. Robo doubled his efforts to run down the stairs. He couldn't generate the power. His movements were tentative, feeble.

At the top of the stairs, ED 209 surveyed the situation. He paused at the first step. His feet were about three times the size of one of the stairs designed for puny humans. He took a hesitant step. His heel alighted on the first stair. He extended a second foot. Again, he balanced his heel on a stair. Cautiously, he took a third step. His own weight caused his remaining earthbound foot to slip off the thin stair.

ED 209 beeped helplessly as he tumbled end over end down to the next landing. The force of his momentum sent him smashing through the guard rail and down the next flight of stairs and the next. Landing, finally, on his back, he found himself staring at the lights above. He lay motionless. A high-tech turtle caught on its back. He began flailing his legs and remaining arm in vain, trying to flip himself over. Missing an arm, however, ED 209's body was lopsided and the sheer weight of his torso made the move impossible. Frustrated, he began firing every weapon in his armory.

Walls and light fixtures began tumbling down around him.

Down below, Robo continued his dizzying downward spiral. His legs ached. He could barely urge his arms to grasp the handrail. His vision was fuzzy. Each stair he took sent a shard of pain swimming up his tendons.

Far above him, he could hear ED 209 blasting helplessly away.

Robo stumbled toward the exit door of the fire stairs. Trying to remember the layout of the building, he deduced that this door would lead him to the parking garage next door and safety. He was right.

And he was wrong.

Stumbling through the door, he was bathed in the unblinking white glare of ten massive spotlights. Robo squinted into the blinding glow, shielding his eyes with a tattered hand. Before him, a line of TurboCruisers stood bumper to bumper. Lieutenant Hedgecock and his

SWAT team, as well as a half dozen officers from the Old Detroit precinct, were hunkered down behind the cars, guns drawn.

Robo stared into the crowd, confused. He heard weapons being cocked in the distance.

Lieutenant Hedgecock addressed his men using a bullhorn. “Prepare to fire.”

Behind the line, Officers Starkweather and Ramirez exchanged startled glances.

“Hey, wait a minute. What is this shit,” Starkweather asked.

Hedgecock shrugged. “We have our orders.”

“Yeah, well who gave those orders?”

“Mr. Jones . . .”

“Fuck Jones and fuck OCP!” Starkweather yelled, pointing at Robo. “He’s a cop, for Christ’s sake! A fucking good cop!”

“We have orders to destroy it,” Hedgecock growled.

Starkweather stood, slid his gun in his holster, and turned his back on the SWAT team. “Perch and rotate, slimemold,” he muttered.

One by one, the cops of the Old Detroit precinct holstered their guns and walked away. Hedgecock was not perturbed. “Fire at will!” he screamed.

Robo managed to urge his legs forward as the SWAT team opened up. The bullets slammed into his chest. The wind was knocked out of his frail shell. He found himself twirling through the air and slamming into a wall. He angled his body and rolled behind a concrete column as bullets hissed through the air around him.

Robo was breathing heavy. He knew that the SWAT team had the firepower of a small army. HK 91s. Uzis. The works. Each man was a professional soldier. They shot to kill.

“Aim for his head!” he heard Hedgecock bellow. “It’s the only way to stop him.”

Robo shrugged. Sumbitch.

He made a half-blind dash for the next column, some fifteen feet away. Bullets slammed into his helmet, badly denting the metal. He clenched his fists and raised them around the exposed area of his face. Another volley slammed into his side, knocking him down to the ground. He began crawling madly toward the next column, bullets chewing into his armor.

Shells whined all around him. The ground erupted into tiny geysers of macadam and metal. He was a dead man. He chuckled to himself. Well, a dead not-quite-man. He was beginning to get the hang of dark humor. He made a mental note of that as he skittered behind the next column.

Slowly, painfully, he pushed himself up on his feet behind the cover of the column. The gunfire trickled to a halt. He glanced to his left. Twenty feet away was a low concrete wall. On the other side, some ten feet below, was the street. If he could make the wall, he could, conceivably, have a chance.

Robo took a deep breath. The silence around him made a very loud reply. The SWAT team was waiting for his next move. He wasn't going to disappoint them.

He sprinted toward the wall. The garage erupted into a solid sheet of sound. The world around him was alive with molten lead. Robo neared the wall. A slug flattened itself against the armor on his back. He found himself tumbling forward. He couldn't lose his balance or he'd slam, head-first, into the wall. His legs were pumping furiously. He arched his back, extended his arms, and kicked forward.

He sailed up and over the wall, clearing it by less than two inches. He found himself tumbling down an offramp and into the alleyway behind the Tower. Above him, he could hear the SWAT members hurry for their Cruisers. He didn't have much time. Turbine engines were whining to life inside the garage. Soon the streets would be crawling with prowling Cruisers, speeding after him like hungry jackals.

Robo stumbled down the deserted alleyway. So far, so good. He froze. At the far end of the alley was a TurboCruiser, its lights flashing. Robo turned and fled in the opposite direction. The Cruiser slowly followed him.

Robo cursed himself for letting it end like this. He shouldn't have underestimated Jones. Who the hell did he think he was anyway? Robo shrugged. He'd been trying to figure that one out for weeks.

A sudden pain in his left leg caused him to falter. He stumbled sideways into a row of garbage cans, floundering in the trash like a drowning man in a sea of crap. The Cruiser's lights were upon him now. The car's siren slammed into his eardrums, causing him to wince. He staggered to his feet. Screw them. If they were determined to take him out, he was determined to fight them.

He stood and faced the headlights. He raised his once-mighty steel hands and formed two colossal fists. He braced himself in a classic prize-fighter stance.

A small cop leaped out of the car and stood before him, hands upraised.

"Murphy," the cop whispered. "It's okay. It's me. Lewis."

Robo dropped his arms to his sides. He began to totter. Lewis ran up to his side.

"Lean on me," she said.

Robo extended a battered arm. Lewis wrapped it around her shoulder and led him to the passenger’s side of the Cruiser. She gently eased him into it, closing the door carefully behind him. She got behind the wheel and gazed at the fragmented features of RoboCop.

“You are one sorry-looking son-of-a-bitch,” she said.

“You should see the other guy.” He half-smiled.

She eased the car out of the alleyway and headed toward the safety of the countless tenements of Old Detroit. “Welcome back, partner.” Lewis grinned.

Robo slumped in the front seat of the Cruiser. He didn’t know exactly why, but he felt as if he belonged there.

[22]

Dick Jones guzzled a cup of coffee and waved one of his three secretaries away from the shambles that once was his office. The place looked a lot worse in the daylight. He figured it would take a work crew at least twenty-four hours to replace the doors, the sections of walls, and the corner of the 112th floor that went into low orbit the night before.

He sighed and sat down behind his desk, flicking on a Watchman TV on his desk. Perky Jess Perkins and dapper Casey Wong were just beginning their early-morning drone.

“Good morning.” Casey smiled, his teeth nearly reaching his earlobes. “I’m Casey Wong with Jess Perkins and these are today’s top stories. It was revealed today by doctors at the Texas Clone Institute that Hollywood immortal Sylvester Stallone died yesterday during an unsuccessful brain transplant. A longtime supporter of bio-engineering, Stallone was ninety-seven. His last film, *Rambo 38: Old Blood,* will be released posthumously next month.”

Jones squinted at the tiny screen. Footage of policemen walking in front of a precinct house with picket signs materialized. Jones nearly gagged on the coffee. Jess picked up the patter. “Police Union representatives and OmniCon continued negotiations today in hopes of averting a citywide strike by police scheduled to begin tonight at midnight. We go now live to Justin Ballard-Watkins.”

A somber kid with a loud blazer stood in front of a precinct house. “Picket lines have already formed around some police stations in the city,” he intoned, “to stress the rank and file’s seriousness about the strike. Cops are on duty today, but will they be on duty tomorrow? That’s the question we put to people in the crime-plagued Lexington area.”

A store owner was pictured boarding up his appliance shop. “They’re public servants,” he groused. “They have job security. They’re not supposed to strike.”

A bearded nouveau-hippie newspaper vendor smiled at the camera. “The cops are workers like everyone else in society. They’re getting a raw deal from management. You know, cops have rights, too.”

Jones flicked off the TV. That’s all he needed. His life wasn’t going down the toilet fast enough. Great way to start a morning. He stared at the coffee. “Marsha! There’s no sugar in this crap!”

Marsha, a pert young woman with a bulldog jaw, marched into his office with a sugar dispenser. She banged it on his desk and glared at him. "There's a moron outside to see you," she snapped. "And if he tries pawing at me one more time, I'll remove his teeth with my shoe."

She spun and left the office. Jones sagged visibly. What else could go wrong? He barked into his intercom, "Send the mor . . . gentleman in."

Clarence Boddicker, wearing shades and a festive Hawaiian shirt, sauntered into the office. He glanced at the ruptured room around him. "Been doing some redecorating?"

Clarence tossed a vial of coke on Jones's desk. "Want a toot?"

"It's a little early, isn't it, Boddicker?"

Clarence smiled, sticking a small shovelful of cocaine up his nose. "It's never too early to feel good."

Jones frowned. "Clarence, you're a fuck-up."

Clarence wiped the coke off his nose. "Hey, let's not start flinging mud . . ."

Jones shrugged. "I've always known that about you but, in spite of that, I depended on you. I figured, Hey. The guy has ambition. He has intelligence. Give him the chance and he'll perform."

"I do the best I can."

"Not good enough, Clarence. The *police officer* who arrested you? The one you spilled your guts to? You're going to have to kill him."

Clarence wasn't concerned. "Hey, pal. I've come through for you whenever you needed a favor. All I ever asked in return was a guarantee of no jail for me and my men. He was taking me to jail . . ."

Jones narrowed his eyes, resembling Mr. Punch more than ever. "He's a cyborg, you idiot: part human, part state-of-the-art technology. He recorded every word you said. His memory is admissible evidence in a court of law. You involved me. You may have damaged me."

"I guess 'oops' isn't going to cut it?" Clarence asked, flashing a lopsided grin.

"This isn't funny, Clarence. I'm in deep shit thanks to you."

"Hey, you wanted dead cops all over Old Detroit so you could sell your robot monster. I did the job. Now, there's a man-machine roaming the streets and you want me to deal with it? No way. I'm out of here, partner."

Jones took a more persuasive tack. "Hold on, Clarence. I didn't say it wouldn't be worth your while. Delta City begins construction in two months. Two million workers will be there, living in trailers. A lot of them will become city residents. A whole new wave of customers for drugs, gambling, prostitution. Delta City will be virgin territory for the

man who knows how to open it up to new markets. One man could control it all, Clarence. You could control it . . . if you eradicate the one obstacle standing in your, *our,* way. RoboCop."

"If I say yes, I'll need all my men."

"Emil DeLorean was bailed out of jail this morning."

Clarence smiled. Jones tossed him the CompuMap card from his desk top. Clarence caught it and stared at the map. A red dot was glowing from a rundown section of town.

"Well," Clarence said. "I guess we're going to be friends after all, Dick. Have you got access to military weaponry?"

Jones nodded. "Of course. We *are* the military."

Clarence picked up the card and stuffed it in his shirt pocket. "Give me a few hours to get a plan going. By tomorrow morning, your man-machine will be ready for the scrap heap."

"That's the way I like to hear you talk, Clarence." Jones beamed.

"I figured," Clarence said, turning to leave. "By the way," he called. "If I were you, I'd fire that ice queen outside. She's a real bitch. Doesn't know how to treat guests."

Jones nodded. "Consider it done."

Jones watched Clarence disappear from the office. He leaned back in his chair. "Asshole."

[23]

Lewis guided the TurboCruiser through a maze of crumbling buildings and shattered dreams. The industrial complex had once been the pride of Detroit, one of its largest and most profitable auto manufacturing plants. Now, it was nothing more than the home of countless rats and roaches.

She slowly drove through a three-story-high door and into a dark, hangarlike structure. She maneuvered the car carefully, avoiding the large slabs of wood and metal debris strewn across the sprawling floor. She glanced at the seat behind her. Clanking softly in the car were two cases of baby food marked “spinach” and “strained beef.”

The interior of the plant was as large as three football fields and, even in broad daylight, nearly pitch black. The only sun that entered the place was at the far end of the structure, where half a wall and a section of the ceiling had given way—the result of bad weather and bad planning.

She heard the clanking of steel ahead in the sunlight. She pulled the car to a stop where Robo sat, patiently hammering his right leg with a small sledge. Lewis got out of the car, removing the baby food and a leather satchel.

She gazed at Robo’s leg. He had stripped off some of the armor plating and his calf was now an exposed puzzle of inner workings. Flexible steel “muscles” quivered with each slam of the hammer head. Lewis dropped the satchel next to Robo with a thud. Robo looked up for the first time. His helmet, still badly mangled, looked horrifying. His one human eye blinked at her.

“Maybe I should have dropped you off at an auto body shop,” she said.

“I could have used the tools,” he muttered, slamming on his leg again.

“I wasn’t sure what you needed,” Lewis said, pointing to the satchel. “I just sort of grabbed things.”

Robo opened the satchel. Several sophisticated hand tools were inside. He pulled out a small cordless power ratchet.

“Thanks, this is great,” he said. “I have to get this thing off.”

“What thing?”

“My helmet.” He fit the pit on the power ratchet and shoved it up under the lip of his helmet, close to his temple. The ratchet made the

sound of a hundred angry locusts. A two-inch machine bolt screwed out of his head at an angle and clanked to the floor. He took the ratchet and fit it on the other side. The buzzing caused Lewis to flinch. “That ought to do it,” he said.

Lewis gaped at Robo as he began to pry the helmet off.

“What do you look like under there, anyway?” she asked.

“Beats me,” he said. “Maybe you’d better turn your back. You may not like what you’re going to see.”

“You can’t look any worse than you do now.” She laughed half-heartedly.

Robo slowly lifted the helmet up and over his head. He tossed it on the ground with a clank. Lewis nodded her head appreciatively. “You know, Murphy, you’re not half bad looking.”

She reached into the glove compartment of the Cruiser and pulled out a small makeup mirror. She handed it to Robo. “You still have blue eyes,” she said. “Sort of.”

He gazed into the mirror. Indeed, his eyes were blue, but they were flecked with tiny red, blue and yellow LEDs which picked up information and fed it to his brain center for analysis.

Robo pulled the mirror back and studied his face. He was forced to grin. His countenance was an elegant blend of flesh and steel, sort of an organic high-tech sculpture which harkened back to either the ancient Greeks or the German Expressionist cinema of the 1920s. It depended on your sense of humor.

Two recessed organic access plates had been installed on his forehead, giving him a distinguished, regal brow. What was left of his hair was short and nubby, ending abruptly in ribbed titanium which spread out from the crown of his skull. He suddenly flashed on Clarence’s last fatal shot in that warehouse a small eternity ago. He touched the back of his skull. A metal plate was firmly bolted in place.

The shock of realization set in. He could no longer escape the truth. He had been the human victim of a murder. And, then, the subject of a high-tech product push. His eyes widened in mute horror. He could not, *would* not face that. It was impossible.

Lewis watched Robo silently, the sadness welling up within her. She extended a tentative finger toward him and touched the fleshy part of his cheekbone. “It’s really good to see you again, Murphy.”

Robo snapped the compact shut and pushed her hand away. He raised his left hand. It was badly mangled. He lowered it and raised his right instead. “Murphy had a wife and son. What happened to them?”

Lewis stood awkwardly, groping for the words. “After your . . . after

the funeral, they moved away."

"Where did they go?"

"Mrs. Murphy signed on with MoonCorp. I'm not sure if you remember or not. She has a sister living at the Luna Industrial Plex. UniCorp pulled a few strings and had everything arranged within two weeks. She thought you were dead. Aw, Murphy, I'm really sorry."

Robo shrugged, picked up the hammer, and began slamming at his leg again. "They would not know me as I am now anyway." He stopped suddenly and dropped his guard, staring at Lewis. "I *feel* them, but I can't remember them. Reconciliation would cause needless trauma."

Lewis tried to put a comforting hand on his shoulder. He waved it back. "Leave me alone."

She backed away, confused and a little hurt. Robo stared at her. "Please," he said. "Go."

Lewis nodded. "I'll be back after dark."

Robo nodded and continued his work. Lewis got back in the car and drove away. There, she reasoned, was the loneliest man in the world.

Robo continued to work throughout the day. Each wham of the hammer, each buzz of a powertool, made him feel more hollow, more alone. He was the only one of his kind, a breed apart. He wasn't a man. He couldn't feel the ways of humanity, fit in with their day-to-day existences. He couldn't grapple with the hopes, the cares, the dreams, the fears that made life interesting for countless millions of people. Yet he wasn't a machine, either. He had no more in common with a supercomputer than he did with the ratchet in his hand. He grew angry as he worked. He was a new-age dinosaur. Designed to be alone. Designed to be solitary. Programmed to stand apart from the world around him.

Robo lit a blowtorch and worked on his ruptured leg. The armor plating began to fit back in place. Armor plating instead of skin. He was probably the most expensive freak in the history of civilization. He finished his leg and sat, alone. It occurred to him that this was to be his fate for . . . how long? Until his death? Would he die? Or would he keep chugging along?

The thought of immortality frightened him. Would he, a man-made machine, stand by and watch generations of humans come and go while he, alone, remained a constant? Would he watch his human companions wither and die while he, his electronic heart whirring placidly, remained stuck in time? He was faced with a very practical form of infinity. A form that would cause the minds of most mortals to buckle under the strain. He chuckled to himself. His laugh echoed eerily within his chest cavity. What was it Woody Allen said about

immortality? "I don't believe in an afterlife, although I am bringing a change of underwear"? Did he remember that? Yes. Very good. He was beginning to remember things more frequently now. That both excited and terrified him. Perhaps it would be better to remain ignorant. Perhaps he should have allowed himself to perish at the hands of ED 209. Let this abomination cease.

He sighed. He could never have done that.

He was trapped now. Trapped by his own will to survive. He knew that, from this day forward, his existence would be haunted by the ghosts of his previous life. He was both dead and alive at the same time: both the gothic mansion and the wraiths that inhabited it. Images. Fleeting glimpses of people, places, things and thoughts of a time long gone would forever flutter through his mind. They would chip at his brain and tear at his sanity. He would never be at peace with himself. He would, in a sense, be haunting himself . . . for how long? Years? Decades? Centuries?

He tore open the baby food containers and began chugging the pasty stuff within. He glanced at the jar. Spinach. Appropriate. "I'm strong to the finish 'cause I eats me spinach," he sang to himself. He remembered that. He finished the carton in a matter of minutes. "I yam what I yam," he smirked. But what was he exactly?

He walked over to the satchel. A full moon was out now, shining down through the ruptured ceiling. The moonlight illuminated a brand new Auto-9 Lewis had brought him. The gun gleamed with oil in the pale blue glow. Robo took the gun out of the satchel and held it in his refurbished left hand, testing the balance. He twirled the gun and slid it into his holster.

He stood stiffly in the abandoned auto factory. So be it. If he was doomed to be a high-tech freak, he couldn't do anything about it. They had stripped him of his humanity. Robbed him of his life. Taken away his family. Destroyed whatever chance he had at normalcy in the name of pure profiteering. They had designed him for one purpose and one purpose only . . . to uphold the law. He would be damned if they'd strip him of that. He would be a twenty-four-hour-a-day, 100 percent cop from now on. He pitied whoever tried to stop him from fulfilling his destiny.

He placed his helmet securely back on his head and moved to a crumbling wall. He gazed out upon the flickering lights of New Detroit. The OmniCon Tower stood high above the rest of the skyline, a benign despot gazing down upon its kingdom. Robo concentrated. The Prime Directive Mode locked into place. **DIRECTIVE ONE: SERVE THE PUBLIC TRUST. DIRECTIVE TWO: UPHOLD THE LAW. DIRECTIVE 3: PROTECT THE INNOCENT. DIRECTIVE**

FOUR: [CLASSIFIED] CMI PRODUCT ID #943054.

The fourth directive began to flash. Robo summoned every inch of willpower in his massive frame. The directives faded from view. He didn't have time to worry about them now. He wouldn't allow it.

He walked over to the empty baby food bottles and, grabbing one, tossed it high in the air. He pulled his gun and fired. Tink! The bullet zipped into a steel girder. The bottle smashed down onto the floor intact. Cursing to himself, Robo tossed up a second bottle and fired. Another miss.

"Damn." He grabbed a full bottle of baby food and downed it as Lewis drove up in her TurboCruiser, screeching to a halt. In the distance, several burglar alarms were screaming.

"What's that?" Robo asked.

"Big trouble," she said. "The rank and file voted a strike tonight."

"I don't understand."

"The cops are striking against OCP."

"But what about the people?" Robo asked.

"They're fending for themselves," she said, listening to the alarms. "And from the sound of it, they're not doing too well."

Robo slammed his fist into a girder, denting it. He was needed out there and he was in no condition for combat.

"What's wrong?"

"My targeting vectors. They're out of alignment. I might as well be cross-eyed."

"Huh?"

Robo tossed up a jar and fired. Miss. Lewis nodded. "I'll help you if you let me."

Robo relaxed. He placed a metal hand on Lewis's shoulder. "Thanks, partner."

Lewis grabbed three jars of baby food and placed them at three different levels on the crumbling walls before them. She ran behind Robo. "Okay, aim, soldier."

Robo flipped into Targeting Mode. A series of green grids appeared in his RoboVision. The grids were slightly out of line. The barrel of his gun was pointed some twenty degrees to the left of the target. Lewis crouched behind him. She slowly angled the gun into the right position. "Hold the pose."

She walked behind Robo and placed her head alongside his, getting a glimpse of the grids playing across his visor. "That's dead-on, as far as I can tell."

Robo concentrated. He locked into Recalibration Mode. The grids

slid into place directly atop the jar of baby food. “Try it now,” Lewis said.

Robo squeezed off a shot. The jar exploded. He moved to the second jar and fired a round. The jar shattered. Third jar. Third shot. Third hit. Robo twirled his gun and slid it into his holster.

They glanced at each other and smiled. In the distances, alarm bells and sirens were wailing all over the city.

“Now what?” Lewis asked.

“We hit the streets.”

“But we’re on strike.”

Robo tossed three jars up in the air and whipped out his handgun, shattering all three jars before they began their downward arc. He jammed the gun safely away and turned to Lewis. “The Law doesn’t go on strike.”

She smiled and ran for the cruiser.

The two partners drove off, the full moon reflecting off their speeding TurboCruiser. Robo smiled to himself. He may not have been a real human being, but there were real people out there who needed his help. That made him feel . . . good. That made him *feel.*

In the last twenty-four hours he had encountered the specters of sorrow, loss, anger, humor, pity, and dedication. He gazed at the mammoth steel hands folded on his lap. Maybe there was hope for him yet.

[24]

The streets of Old Detroit looked like a battle zone. Small bands of looters smashed store windows and yanked out merchandise, howling like primitive warriors. Emil leaned against a wall on an empty street, smoking a cigarette. He hadn't liked spending a night in jail. Worse yet, he hadn't enjoyed the feeling that he had been put there by a ghost. He had tried to explain exactly what had happened to Clarence. Clarence would have none of it. He thought Emil was having another drug flashback. Emil shrugged. That was possible.

OCP had said publicly that this robot cop was their creation. He wasn't a human. He hardly even behaved like one. Yeah. Emil had probably just been seeing things. After all, he had almost been deep-fried at the gas station. He put out the cigarette and lit another, tapping a small foot nervously. Clarence and Leon were late. Emil puffed away, staring at the white van parked a few feet away. Damn it, if he could get here on time in that hunk of shit, why couldn't Clarence?

A sudden flash of inspiration lurched through his brain. Swinging his leg up, he kicked the TV shop window behind him, shattering the glass and setting off the alarm. He reached in, yanked out a large ghetto blaster and turned it on. Funk music echoed down the empty street. Emil began to boogie, the glass crunching beneath his feet.

A horn brought him to attention. Clarence and Leon pulled up in Clarence's battered 6000 SUX, a gas guzzler built like a tank. Clarence slid out of the car, two grenades hanging off his flak jacket. Leon held a shotgun. He wasn't a happy man. Thanks to Robo's interference at the coke joint, his jaw would be wired shut for quite a few weeks to come.

Emil was wearing a prison shirt. He displayed it proudly. "Thanks for pulling strings, Clarence. They even let me keep the shirt."

"It suits your disposition," Clarence said as Joe pulled up in an immaculate black SUX 6000. Joe climbed out of the car, a butterfly bandage across his shattered nose. Clarence gazed at Joe's wheels. Joe's car was in great shape. Clarence's, the same make, the same year, looked like a rolling slum.

Leon saw Clarence's expression and grinned under his wire. "Hey, Clarence. Joe's got a car just like yours."

"Not quite like mine," Clarence said. He reached inside the trunk of

his car and pulled out a bulky, lethal-looking rifle: a 20mm Cobra Assault Cannon with video targeting sights. Clarence aimed the gun at Joe's new car. He squeezed off a titanic round. A 20mm hole ripped through the driver's side door. Clarence smiled and fired a second time. He blew away the front end of Joe's car. Joe's recently stolen, spanking new vehicle lurched forward like a dead horse and hissed toward the ground.

Clarence flashed a smile at the devastated gang member, "Nice car, Joe."

Joe was at a loss for words. "You're crazy, man."

"It's part of my charm," Clarence said, yanking three more Cobras out of his trunk. He handed one to each one of his men. "It's party time in Old Detroit," Clarence said sweetly.

Emil, delighted with the new weapon, spun and fired three rounds at an appliance store. The front of the store simply exploded. Toasters and televisions sailed onto the street in fragments. "Messy," Emil said, suddenly grinning, "but I *like* it."

Joe aimed at a fire hydrant and squeezed off a round. The hydrant shattered, sending a gusher of water some thirty feet into the air. "Damn!" He chuckled, firing round after round into the storefronts on the street. Emil cackled and joined in the fun. Explosion after explosion rocked the block. Smoke and debris were everywhere. "Sort of looks like Old Beirut, don't it?" Joe grinned.

Clarence sighed and turned to Leon. They had the attention span of gnats. He pulled out the CompuMap card. The red dot was pulsating.

"The metal man is in the factory district," Clarence said.

Leon nodded. "So? I don't get it. Charity work ain't your style. We have no truck with the hammer-head cop."

"Delta City," Clarence said. "That's our reward. We're in on the ground floor of the future, Leon. There's going to be rackets there like in any other town only bigger, better, more profitable. And we're going to run them."

"All for offing the cop?"

"Uh-huh." Clarence grinned. "We're on our way up the corporate ladder, my man. The more Delta City prospers, the more briefcase-carrying stooges UniCorp sucks into the complex, the more money we make."

"You're a good businessman, Clarence."

"I'm a *great* businessman, Leon. Aw, Jeez."

"What?"

Clarence stared at the map. "The tin man is moving. Let's roll."

Joe and Emil were still blowing up the street when Clarence called:

"Stop wasting ammo and let's go."

The two chuckling gunmen trotted up to the van. Emil slid behind the wheel, whooping. "And they're off," he crowed, "for an evening of happy hunting."

The van chugged through the smoke and flames caused by the two assault cannons. "The military gets to use this kind of stuff all the time?" Joe marveled.

"Makes you wish you were more patriotic, don't it?" Emil grinned.

The white van disappeared into the night, Clarence following at a discreet distance in his car, Leon at the wheel.

All through Old Detroit, the world seemed to be coming apart at the seams.

Lewis guided the TurboCruiser through the hell on earth. Cars were turned upside down in the streets, ablaze. Looters smashed store windows with pipes, grabbing as much merchandise as they could carry.

Robo watched a fat man throw a bus stop bench through the window of a liquor store. "Hey, everybody," he bellowed. "Drinks are on the house."

He wondered to himself how people could do this to each other. The stores they were looting, the property they were destroying belonged to their neighbors—people not much better off than the looters.

"Look out," Robo exclaimed. Lewis slammed on the brakes as a group of looters darted before her. One carried a television. Another struggled with a writhing bundle of fur coats. A third man tried to balance an entire side of beef.

"Over there." Robo pointed. Outside a store proclaiming LEE'S SPORTING GOODS, a group of street rabble was growing dangerously rowdy. Looters were running out of the store carrying skis, tennis rackets, baseball bats, and guns. The elderly Chinese owner of the store, Mr. Lee, ran after them, a pistol upraised. He was on the point of hysteria. "Stop! Stop! Come back tomorrow. Big sale!"

A large man in a plaid shirt carrying a deer rifle calmly shot the elderly man in the leg. "I'm busy tomorrow," he rumbled. The gang around him began firing their guns wildly in the air, like kids armed with handfuls of firecrackers. Old Mr. Lee, on the ground, cringed as the bullets ricocheted around him.

Lewis brought the car to a stop. Robo, clenching his jaw, emerged from the car. Lewis looked at him, worried. "What are you going to do?"

"One thing about a mob you can be sure of," Robo said. "It has no

guts."

Lewis thought about the remark, shrugged, and grabbing her riot gun, got out of the car as well.

Robo walked down the flame-spattered street, his Auto-9 drawn. Lewis crouched behind him, behind the TurboCruiser, covering him with her shotgun.

Robo stopped ten feet away from the store, raised his gun and fired three times in the air.

"All right, folks," he said in a booming voice. "The party's over. Drop your guns."

The mob of looters turned as one and gazed at the lone cop. A dozen held guns. The rest carried TV sets, stereos, scuba equipment, and blenders. One tall kid bounced a basketball casually. The goon in the checkered suit stepped forward, pointing his rifle at Robo.

"Hey, cop," he said, doing some quick calculating. "There are thirty of us and only two of you."

The crowd yelled in agreement.

Robo shrugged and fired. The guy in the checkered shirt clutched his shoulder and collapsed on the ground, whining like an infant. The deer rifle clattered to the pavement. Robo calmly fired four more times. The deer rifle spun in a circle as the slugs pinged off its barrel and butt.

The crowd gasped. Several people dropped their guns. A basketball bounced harmlessly down the street.

Robo stared at the mob. "Anybody else have anything to say?"

The mob stood, transfixed. The fat man who gutted the bar staggered down the street, holding a bottle.

"Hey," he exclaimed. "You shot that guy!"

Robo adjusted his voice to Public Address Mode and proclaimed loudly. "Go back to your homes! Lock your doors and stay there! Do it now!"

He faced the drunk. "You got a problem, bozo?"

The drunk dropped the bottle. "Me? Uh-uh. Just pointing out a fact. That's all. Really. I was just going anyhow."

The crowd began to disperse. Robo watched them leave. At the far end of the street, a white van slowed to a stop. Lewis glanced over her shoulder. She wondered where she had seen it before. She continued to cover Robo. Something within her made her glance back at the van. The back of the truck slid open and Joe emerged, holding one of the massive Cobra ACs.

Lewis remembered the face. It was the goon from the factory. The pisser! "Murphy! Heads up!" she screamed as Joe opened fire.

Robo addressed the scattering crowd. “Everybody! Hit the dirt!”

A volley of explosive rounds screamed through the air and tore up the street. Looters went flying, bleeding, through the remnants of the storefronts. People fled, screaming, running, heading for home, through the smoke and flame. One missile sent a manhole cover flipping into the air like a coin. The guy in the checkered shirt tried to get to his feet. The manhole cover struck him in the forehead. He fell to the street one last time.

Robo ran for the TurboCruiser, firing his Auto-9 at the van. Joe cackled as he fired several more deadly rounds. A shell narrowly missed Robo’s head and smashed into a light pole. The pole shattered, bursting into a maelstrom of shrapnel. The concussion sent Robo sinking to his knees.

Lewis had had enough. She jumped in the TurboCruiser and, burning rubber, hung a sharp u-turn in the street. Cradling her shotgun in her free hand, she aimed the TurboCruiser directly for the van. Joe froze for a moment as the TurboCruiser two-wheeled it in a circle around the van. Lewis squeezed off a round. Joe leaped back inside the van as the shotgun blast shredded part of the back door.

Lewis barreled back down the street, screeching to a halt next to Robo. Robo was in the midst of climbing in when Joe reappeared at the van’s rear, firing another round. The shell sizzled past the Cruiser and took out what was left of the front of Lee’s Sporting Goods shop. The flying debris shattered the windshield of the Cruiser. Lewis yelped in pain as several shards of glass sliced into her cheek.

“You in?” she gasped.

“Yeah,” Robo grunted.

“Sonsobitches,” Lewis muttered, gunning the gas. She sent the Cruiser zooming down the street. The van ground gears and took off in pursuit. Lewis held the wheel tightly. Explosions roared to her left and to her right. Robo tossed a new clip into his Auto-9. He was bleeding from a gash in his cheek. He glanced at Lewis. She had an identical cut below her right eye.

“You okay?” Robo asked.

“Yeah. You?”

“I’ve been worse.”

“Hey, Murphy. What the hell was that?”

“A Cobra Assault Cannon . . . built by our friends at OmniCon for the Army.”

“Jeeez!” Lewis exclaimed as a battered SUX leaped out of a side street and sped for the Cruiser’s midsection. Lewis accelerated. Clarence’s car clipped the front end of the Cruiser with a crunch,

sending it spinning along the street like a pinwheel. Leon, at the wheel, let out a war whoop as Clarence cheered him on. "We got them!"

"Now, let's finish them," Clarence said, lifting a Cobra of his own. Leon charged the police vehicle head-on.

Inside the patrol vehicle, Lewis fought the wheel, trying to stay in control. The SUX bore down on them. She threw the car into reverse and pressed the accelerator to the floor. The SUX kept on coming, aimed directly for the front grille of the police car. Lewis, looking over her shoulder, drove backward down a flame-strewn side street.

In the SUX, Clarence hoisted his Cobra out of the side window. Robo drew his Auto-9 and flipped his senses into Targeting Mode. He took a deep breath and squeezed off three rounds.

Clarence and Leon ducked as the windshield before them broke into a spiderweb pattern and collapsed inward.

The SUX slowed down, but continued coming. Lewis cursed under his breath. At the far end of the street, directly behind her, the white van pulled up. She had driven right into a classic bookend situation. Joe leaped out of the truck with a Cobra in hand. He dropped to his knees and drew a bead on the zigzagging Cruiser. Lewis glanced in her sideview mirror. "Hold on," she barked.

She sent the Cruiser skidding into a narrow alleyway used for loading and unloading cargo. The SUX barreled right by the alleyway, unable to brake in time. Still driving in reverse, Lewis navigated through the narrow alleyway at a smooth 80 mph. Skidding out onto the next street, she jammed the car into drive and slammed on the gas.

She glanced in the rearview mirror. The white van rounded a corner and sped after them. Joe leaned out the rider's window and fired his Cobra.

Explosions once again rocked the Cruiser. "We've got company," Lewis said.

"With more on the way, no doubt," Robo said, looking over his shoulder.

Clarence's SUX skidded around the van, picking up speed. Inside the windshieldless car, Leon squinted his eyes as the 60-mph wind ripped through the front seat. Clarence calmly flipped on a pair of sunglasses and balanced his Cobra on the dented dash. He fired a round.

The shell sailed over the speeding TurboCruiser's hood and smashed down into its right engine. Robo and Lewis hung on for dear life as the car reeled under the impact. The right rear flamed out. Half of the gauges and readouts on the dash sputtered and disappeared. Lewis slammed a fist down on the fire control button off the steering

column. She wiped blood out of her eye. She gripped the wheel, white-knuckling it, pushing the damaged car for all the power it could muster. Warning tones buzzed and panel lights flashed on the functioning sections of the dash. Robo reloaded his Auto-9.

It was his last clip.

Lewis barked into the ComLink. "1-Baker-44 . . . Officers need assistance. Repeat, officers need assistance in Old Detroit."

She was greeted by a wall of silence.

"Goddamn it," she yelled. "Come on. I know you're out there."

Silence.

"Great. We're going to lose the car."

Robo looked over his shoulder. "We may lose more than that."

Leon sent the SUX surging in front of the van. It was now right on the Cruiser's tail. Clarence fired the Cobra once. Twice. The shells sailed harmlessly over the Cruiser. Lewis maneuvered the car around a corner and over a badly tattered bridge.

The SUX and the van sailed over the bridge after them.

Lewis skidded around a corner and into an alleyway. At the end of the decaying path stood an imposing twelve-foot cyclone fence. Lewis glanced at Robo. Robo nodded. Lewis put the pedal to the metal, coaxing the Cruiser to 60 mph. The car bounded down the alleyway, hitting the fence hard. The fence flew apart in several large sections. The TurboCruiser sailed through the remains of an abandoned steelyard.

Robo pointed to a decrepit foundry building.

The Cruiser zipped inside the cavernous building.

In the alleyway, the van and the SUX cautiously drove over the remains of the fence. Leon slowed the SUX down. Clarence glanced up at a rusted sign, OK STEEL WORKS—CONDEMNED . . . NO TRESPASSING . . . DOG ON DUTY.

Clarence pointed toward the foundry. The two vehicles cruised to a stop before the building's massive doors. Joe jumped out of the van, gun still in hand.

Emil leaped out of the van. "Let's smoke 'em."

Joe smiled, calling into the building. "Hey, boys and girls, the wreckin' crew is here."

Clarence sighed and got out of his car. These morons could be so childlike at times. He turned to Joe and Emil as Leon stepped out from behind the wheel of the SUX. "Inside, we stick together. Nothing fancy. All you have to do is kill them. Understood?"

"You got it." Emil grinned.

Clarence pointed to the van. "Get behind the wheel, Emil. You and I

will drive in. Joe and Leon will walk point."

The four goons entered the towering building. Inside, tiny shafts of moonlight filtered down to the ground from the holes in the roof. The place was huge and dark and damp.

The van and the SUX purred slowly through the building, Joe and Leon, carrying their Cobras, walking cautiously in the light afforded by the headlights behind them. Joe and Leon stiffened. A noise to the right. Drip. Drip. Drip. They relaxed and laughed. Rainwater dripping along reddened steel beams.

Leon began flicking his tongue against his wired jaw nervously. Somewhere, in the distance, a dog was barking.

In the SUX, Clarence peered nervously into the rearview mirror. In the van behind Clarence, Emil lit his third cigarette.

Darkness swirled around them.

Mist rose from the ground.

Joe began walking sideways before the vehicles. Another dog was snarling somewhere.

"Jesus!" Leon exclaimed.

Up ahead, behind a mound of debris, two dogs stood like hounds of hell. Their eyes gleamed red in the headlights of the van. A large and powerful doberman was in the lead. A second mutt, part shepherd, part dinosaur, bared his fangs.

Joe aimed his Cobra. "Fucking dogs."

He let a charge fly in the dogs' direction. The dogs galloped off before the shell hit, blowing a section of the floor sky high. Smoke cascaded through the foundry.

Joe and Leon exchanged hearty laughs. There was nothing like tormenting a lower species to buoy one's spirits.

Joe heard some movement behind him. He turned. The doberman. He raised his gun and fired quickly. The dog's body shattered and fragmented. A plume of smoke slowly rose toward the ceiling. In the distance, the surviving dog howled mournfully. It gave Leon chills. Joe didn't seem to mind. If he met that second critter, he'd turn him into hamburger as well.

When the smoke cleared, a voice boomed across the room. "Looking for me?"

Outside a large pair of exit doors, some thirty feet from the building Robo stood, gun drawn, under a cluster of decaying chemical tanks. The moon shone down from overhead, giving his helmet an eerie, medieval appearance.

Clarence's gang hesitated for a moment. Emil lit another cigarette. Leon and Joe exchanged frightened looks. Finally, Clarence leaned out

of his car. “Get him,” he ordered.

Before either Leon or Joe could move, the howl of a turbine engine sliced through the air. Clarence stiffened behind the wheel of his car. What the hell was going on here? In the front seat of the van, Emil turned around, not quite believing what he saw. Lewis, in the Cruiser, sped directly for the rear of the van. Emil, eyes agog, tried revving the van’s engines. It was too late. The Cruiser smashed into the back of the truck hard, lifting the rear in the air.

Lewis hit reverse, backed up and, tires squealing, smashed into the van again, tires digging in. Inside, Emil pumped the brakes in panic. The van began to move forward. Emil continued to play with the brakes, gripping the wheel madly. Lewis’s car pushed the whining truck out of the building and into the steelyard. Emil didn’t know how to handle this. The van was beginning to pick up momentum.

Lewis gritted her teeth, wiped the caked blood from under her right eye, and continued to floor the Cruiser. Clarence gunned the motor of his SUX, swerving so as not to be hit by the skidding truck behind him. Emil gazed out of the windshield in terror. The van was sliding toward a tank clearly marked DANGER: TOXIC WASTE.

In the Cruiser, Lewis kicked in the after-burner and then slammed on the brakes.

Emil wrestled with the wheel. There was no controlling the van now. It hit a large oil slick and rammed the tank broadside. Ten yards away, standing clear, Leon and Joe watched mesmerized as the van punched a hole into the tank. There was a dreadfully long second where time itself seemed to have come to a stop. Then, a scream. The back of the van blew open and a small tidal wave of chemicals washed out onto the ground, Emil sputtering within its grasp.

Emil writhed on the ground, surrounded by foam. He got to his knees and raised his hands to his face. He grabbed his burning skin. It came off in his hands in large, stringy wads. Emil began to melt, literally, as Joe and Leon decided that the time was right to open up on Robo.

Emil ran blindly into the fray. He tumbled into Leon. “Help me, please!” he screamed.

Leon brushed the screaming, melting henchman away from him. “Get the fuck away from me, man. Get the fuck away!”

Leon ran for cover, leaving Emil to run, dying slowly, out of the steelyard into the night.

Joe and Leon continued to fire their Cobras at Robo. They were using twist bullets now, deadly slugs that burrowed into their targets before exploding from within. Robo nimbly tilted his body this way and that as the bullets whirled above and beside him. He nudged his

vision into Targeting Mode. He locked onto Clarence. The gangleader had swung his car across the steelyard and was now doubling back toward the cyborg.

Sweating behind the wheel of his SUX, Clarence ducked before Robo had the chance to fire. Boddicker slammed his foot down on the gas. He aimed the SUX directly at the cyborg cop. The cumbersome car picked up speed. Thirty. Forty. Fifty miles an hour. Robo fired at the zigzagging auto, his slugs slamming into the hood of the auto but doing no damage.

Clarence screamed with glee as the right front fender slammed into RoboCop, sending the officer tumbling onto the ground.

The SUX zoomed off across the yard and toward the largest building in the complex, the pressing plant. Lewis, in her TurboCruiser, roared after it. Joe and Leon scrambled across the steelyard, firing at the TurboCruiser.

RoboCop, dazed, ran toward the pressing plant. He was greeted with a hail of bullets. Robo dove, head-first, and tumbled across the macadam as the ground erupted around him. Calculating where the shots were being fired from, he leaped to his feet and fired two rounds twenty degrees to his left.

Behind a pile of girders, Leon and Joe hit the dirt as the two slugs pinged into the metal. By the time they got back to their feet, Robo had disappeared into the plant.

In the massive plant, the SUX weaved between the ancient hot rolling presses and the huge, Brobdingagian girders that supported the sagging ceiling. Lewis, in her Cruiser, paced the SUX, shadowing its every move.

Behind the wheel, Lewis was getting tired of playing cat and mouse. She floored the one-engined vehicle, smashing into the back of the SUX with a deafening crunch. Clarence cursed, spinning the wheel, twisting and turning the body of the car away from the Cruiser. Lewis braked slightly, allowing the SUX to surge ahead. She fed the Cruiser gas once more and came up alongside the large car. She cut the wheel hard to the right, slamming into the side of Clarence's car with a thud. The screech of metal on metal echoed through the cavernous plant as Lewis forced Clarence's car off on a sharp angle toward a large rolling press.

Clarence pulled further to the right, disconnecting his car from the Cruiser. He reached across the seat for his mighty Cobra. Lewis smashed into his car from behind again. The SUX lurched. Clarence, cradling the gun in his left arm, stuck the muzzle out the window. He was about to fire it at Lewis when he glimpsed something running toward his car.

He gaped at the apparition before him.

It was a monster.

He blinked.

No, it was the moving, shriveling, skeleton that had once been Emil. Emil staggered toward the car, the few remnants of his flesh hanging in large strips from his body. His muscle and tissue were exposed. His mouth was no more than a yawing hole in the center of a wad of semi-solid matter that had once been a face.

Emil opened the hole in his face wide, a gaping silent scream. The SUX smashed into him, hard. Parts of Emil flew into the front of the car. Clarence wrestled with the wheel. The large car smashed into the side of a rolling press and began to spin totally out of control through the plant.

Clarence fought to both regain control and remove the bits of steaming, chemically tainted flesh from his flak jacket. He didn't see the girder until it was too late. The SUX crunched into a massive support beam, twisted, and began to roll the length of the floor. It seemed to pick up speed as it went. It hit a second beam and crumpled into a V shape.

The car landed upright. Clarence was slumped at the wheel. His head rested on the car horn. The SUX, looking like a 2,000-pound accordion, emitted a staccato beeeeep.

Lewis slowed the Cruiser to a halt. She glanced at the ground in front of the car. Clarence's Cobra AC lay on the ground near his battered vehicle. There was a human hand wrapped around the barrel. Emil's hand.

Lewis slowly got out of the car and approached the SUX. Clarence was still behind the wheel. Smoke began to ooze from under the hood. Lewis kicked the Cobra aside. She approached the front door. Clarence was bleeding from the forehead. She eased the door open.

Clarence lurched to life. Before Lewis had time to back away, Boddicker pulled a .45 and fired three rounds. Lewis flew back through the air violently, blood spurting from her chest, her side, and her leg.

"You're dead meat, cop," Lewis heard from above.

Landing on her back, writhing in pain, she stared at the ceiling. Joe and Leon were roaming the catwalks above. Leon stood in a glass operations booth. "And now, for the final act," Leon announced, flicking a switch.

The lights in the plant went on. Lewis winced as the stark white light bathed her sweating flesh in a blinding glow. She began to shake. Everything hurt at once. She knew it was bad. Very, very bad.

“How about a little target practice.” Joe chortled, smiling down at the bullet-riddled form of Anne Lewis.

A bullet sizzled by his head. “Sounds fine with me,” came a loud growl.

The two men looked down on the ground. Robo, gun drawn, was charging full tilt across the floor of the plant. Clarence, spotting the cyborg, climbed stiffly out of his car and made a move for his fallen Cobra AC.

Robo fired from the hip. Clarence screamed and went down on his knees. Coughing, he staggered to his feet. “Better living through science,” he cackled. A flattened bullet fell to the ground off his flak jacket.

Clarence ran off past the bleeding Lewis. Robo made a move to fire at the fleeing killer. The ground around him exploded. Joe was firing from the catwalk. Robo hit the ground, rolling, returning fire all the while.

Robo rolled up next to Lewis. Twist bullets tore into the ground around them. “Hang on, partner,” Robo whispered.

As gently as possible, Robo pulled the bleeding policewoman behind the wrecked SUX. They’d be safe there for a few seconds. The bullets stopped sizzling. Robo could hear footsteps above him. He realized that Joe and Leon were jockeying around for a clear shot.

He dismissed them for the moment. He gazed down at the ashen face of the woman. He cradled her head in his cold, steel hands. He touched her soft, white cheek with his left thumb. Tears were flowing from her eyes. “It hurts, Murphy.”

“I know.” Robo nodded. He gazed tenderly at her. She seemed to have the face of a sweet, dying child. Her body stiffened, then relaxed. She closed her eyes. She made no further effort to speak. “Lewis?” Robo called. “Anne?” The woman did not move. Robo heard the footsteps above him grow louder. He gently laid Lewis’s head down on the concrete. “I’ll be right back.”

Robo broke cover and ran the length of the plant. Above him, Joe fired until his clip was spent. Still running, Robo flipped himself into Combat Mode. He glanced at the catwalk above him. A complex schematic analysis of Joe’s position raced across his mind’s eye. Robo ducked behind a steel support girder. Joe, now reloaded, sent another volley of deadly twist bullets in Robo’s direction. The bullets slammed into the mighty girder, making it flex and shake.

Robo crouched, taking it. A sudden thought occurred to him. Joe was firing from in front of Robo . . . but where was Leon? Robo spun around in time to see Leon fire a twist round from the control booth far behind and above Robo. Robo had .03 second to hit the ground

before the bullet smacked into its intended target: Robo's skull.

The twist bullets smacked into the steel pylon some three inches from Robo's head. A slice of the girder blew out, causing the entire beam to buckle. Robo was unable to roll for cover as the girder and large chunks of the steel roof collapsed down on him in one gigantic pile.

On the catwalk, Joe glanced across the overhead mazeway at Leon. "You got him! You sonofagun! You got him."

"Maybe," Leon said, looking through the video rangefire on his Cobra. "If I did, I'm going to finish him off now."

Leon peered through the sights. He slowly scanned the rubble far below. Twisted steel. Concrete slabs. Bits of roofing. A hand. Robo's hand. Leon panned upward along the length of an arm. He locked onto the back of Robo's head. This was going to be easy. This was going to be fun.

"Hold your fire," called Clarence from below.

Leon did as he was told. Clarence appeared at the entrance to the building. "I promised someone I'd take care of the tin man personally."

"Shit," Leon hissed. "This is going to take forever."

Clarence slowly and stiffly walked across the building. He walked past the battered SUX. Behind the car, Lewis's hand quivered. She slowly flexed her fingers. She slid them across her face. She opened her eyes. The nerve endings throughout her body were on fire. Pain washed through her in great rippling waves. She could hear herself wheezing. Punctured lung, probably. She seemed to be hissing. Losing air. Losing blood. Losing life. Far above her, on the catwalk, she saw Leon lean out of the control booth. She glanced under the car. Five feet away from her was Clarence's abandoned Cobra. She tried to slide toward it. No use. Everything in her body seemed shattered. She closed her eyes and cried. She was in pain but, more than that, she was angry. She had been suckered. She had made a tremendously dumb move and, now, she and her partner were going to pay for it . . . with their lives.

Clarence continued his march toward the pile of debris. He pulled a grenade off his flak jacket and began bouncing it from hand to hand. He stopped some twenty feet away from the pile. He pulled the pin on the grenade.

In the rubble, Robo slowly turned his head to see Clarence illuminated by the bright white ceiling lights. He spotted the explosive in the maniac's hand.

Clarence emitted a shrill, whiny laugh. "Sayonara, RoboCop."

Clarence tossed the grenade into the debris and backed away. The grenade bounced through the twisted steel and roofing and landed a foot from Robo's face. Robo twisted beneath the mountain of steel, extending his hand toward the grenade.

"Everyone say bye-bye." Clarence laughed.

Clarence's laughter was short lived. Emitting a thundering roar, Robo rose up out of the steel scrap heap like a Bronze Age god come to life. He held the grenade aloft, triumphantly. He hurled it with expert calculation toward the catwalk above.

Joe screamed as the grenade hit the catwalk not four inches from his left leg. He turned to run as the explosive detonated. Pounds of catwalk and ounces of Joe fell to the floor as the walkway began to crumble. What was left of Joe clung to the catwalk, clawing desperately for something to hold on to. Joe glanced down at the floor. His left foot was missing. He was spewing blood like a fountain.

The catwalk splintered and collapsed, Joe falling with it.

Joe landed with a thud on a spiked wall far below. The spike tore through his right leg, leaving him hanging like a rag doll, upside down from the wall. He was in too much shock to scream. But he was still alive, damn it. The robot hadn't killed him. Joe wanted revenge so much he could taste it. He began to writhe, impaled on the spike.

In the glass booth, Leon cursed and, raising his Cobra, drew a bead on Robo. "Come on, man," Leon whispered. "Move just a little to the right. Just get away from that girder."

Below him, Lewis bit her lower lip, cursed herself for being weak, and rolled over to the abandoned Cobra. Sitting bolt upright she grabbed it and fired it blind. A sudden stab of pain in her spine caused her to collapse from the recoil. She passed out as, high above her, a twist bullet slammed through the floor of the booth and imbedded itself into Leon's chest from below.

Leon coughed, amazed, as blood began to flow down his leg. He dropped his Cobra, realizing that, in a few milliseconds, the bullet inside him would detonate.

The control booth shot across the roof level in a thousand pieces of glass, plastic, and flesh.

Across the plant, Joe heard the crunch of solid debris hitting the ground and the sickening thuds made by the falling body parts that had once been his partner in crime. Leon's death stirred something in Joe. "Goddamn lady cop," he hissed, still impaled on the spike. Grabbing the spike, he slowly pulled himself up onto the top of the wall. He lifted his mangled leg off the point and lowered himself to the floor. His Cobra was only a few feet in front of him. One good shot and he'd take out the lady cop for good. If he could hit the SUX's gas

tank, there'd be barbecued bitch for dinner.

Joe made a move for the gun. He heard a growling sound behind him. He turned and spun as the remaining guard dog leaped down from a pile of slag. The shepherd eyed Joe, saliva dribbling from its open mouth. Joe gawked at the dog. He wished he had finished both the mutts off in the foundry. The dog was upon him in a second, teeth bared, claws slashing. Numbed by now from the pain in his leg, Joe calmly watched as the rows of teeth tore into his arm and his neck.

The remnants of the control booth still fluttered to the ground.

The growling of the dog subsided.

Officer Lewis lay, silent, behind the SUX.

Soon there were only two beings in the plant left on their feet. A cyborg cop and a deranged killer.

They faced each other calmly, awaiting the showdown between man and a machine that was beginning to feel like a man.

[25]

Robo glared at the lone human figure before him. Painful pangs of memory flooded his mind. He saw Jan. Jimmy. He felt the gunblast shear off the back side of his skull. He heard the cruel laughter in the warehouse. He remembered the blackness, the darkness during his countless operations. He saw Anne Lewis's pale white face cradled in his hands. He gripped his gun tightly, aware of the presence of steel where there once had been flesh. He didn't seem to mind that now. He felt anger. Rage. This was the man who was responsible for his tremendous loss.

The images faded away.

Boddicker remained fixed in place as Robo slowly advanced toward him. Boddicker grinned, the smile of a madman whose back was against a wall. He removed the last grenade from his flak jacket. He slowly pulled out the pin.

Robo continued to march forward.

In a smooth, feline movement, Clarence hurled the grenade overhand at the advancing cyborg. Robo drew his gun and fired, hitting the grenade mid-arc. The force of the explosion knocked Clarence off his feet. He landed on his back, skidding across the rain-slicked floor of the plant.

Boddicker scrambled backward across the floor. Robo walked toward him. Robo smiled at the cringing human, spinning his gun and sliding it effortlessly back into his holster. He wouldn't need it now. Clarence backed up against a wall. He looked this way and that. There was no way out of this one. He relaxed. Well, no sweat. He smiled at Robo.

"Okay, okay. I give up. Okay? Does that make you happy?"

Robo continued to move toward the man.

"I said I give up, man," Clarence babbled. "Come on. Take me in. Read me my rights."

Robo bent down over the man.

"Come on, do your riff. I have the right to remain silent. That shit."

Robo wrapped a steel hand around Boddicker's neck and slowly, methodically, lifted him up against the wall.

"Okay. You proved your point. You're a supercop. All right? I realize that. Now, do your duty. Take me in."

Robo shook his head back and forth. “I’m not going to arrest you anymore, Mr. Boddicker.”

Robo slowly cocked his left fist back. Clarence’s eyes widened. He saw the blow coming. Robo slammed his steel fist into Clarence’s face. The fist emerged on the other side of the wall, drops of dribbling crimson liquid reflecting in the moonlight off the clenched knuckles.

Robo pulled his fist back through the wall. He let Boddicker’s headless body slide to the ground.

Robo turned and walked over to Lewis. She looked very small lying there on the ground. A puddle of her own blood surrounded her. Robo slung a Cobra over his shoulder and gently lifted Lewis, cradling her in his arms. He gazed down upon her. For a brief instant, she was every woman he had ever cared about. He walked outside the plant. The sun was rising. There were no longer sirens blaring in the distance. The sky seemed remarkably blue for some reason.

Lewis coughed. Robo stared tenderly into her eyes. “Good morning,” he whispered.

Lewis smiled. “Hey, Murphy. I’m really a wreck. Reed’s going to be pissed off.”

“I doubt that.” He smiled.

A dog barked. Robo looked down. A giant German shepherd stood beside him, wagging its tail. “You might as well come along,” Robo told the dog. “Misfits belong together.”

Robo carried Lewis toward the front gate. Two TurboCruisers, sirens screaming, pulled up outside the steelyard. Starkweather, Ramirez, and two other cops jumped out.

“Jesus H. Christ, Robo,” Starkweather exclaimed.

Robo gently handed Lewis to Starkweather. “Get her to a hospital.”

He turned and walked toward the battered TurboCruiser sitting near the open bay doors of the pressing plant. The dog padded alongside him. Robo held the rider’s side of the car open for the dog. He climbed in behind the wheel and, gunning the engine, raced by the four startled cops.

He headed out of Old Detroit.

He still had some unfinished business to attend to in the better section of town.

[26]

In the OCP Tower, a very composed Dick Jones stood at the head of the board table, next to the Old Man, addressing the gathered board members. The police strike was in the headlines across the country. Those headlines translated into bad press for OmniCon. Jones was doing his best to finesse the situation.

"As far as I'm concerned, they can strike forever," Jones sneered. "I've got a 209 model downstairs guarding the building now. By the end of the week we can have more in place all over the city."

The Old Man seemed to consider this. "But what about the publicity, Dick? We don't want to seem heartless."

Jones sighed. He'd have to be very long-winded about all this, very circuitous. What the hell, he had the time.

Outside the building, Robo guided the battered TurboCruiser to the curb. He patted the shepherd on the head. "I won't be long," he said.

He eased himself out of the car and stood next to the driver's door. He came face to face with ED 209. The Olympian robot marched slowly toward the cruiser, his cannon arms upraised.

"Your vehicle is illegally parked on private property. You have fifteen seconds to . . ."

Robo reached into the front seat, slid the Cobra AC out and, with one hand, fired pointblank at the lumbering killing machine. Thwap. ED 209 looked down at his chest cavity as a neat 20mm hole appeared as if by magic. Suddenly, ED 209's body began gyrating wildly, the twist bullet burying itself deep and deeper within his insides. The lumbering droid jitter-bugged through the tower's statue garden, mashing several statues into smithereens before exploding.

Robo ducked as the debris flew over the Cruiser. The dog inside watched the scene placidly. When the smoke cleared, all that was left of ED 209 were his elephantine feet, still standing in place.

Robo marched up the front stairs leading into the tower.

In the boardroom, Dick Jones was still practicing his finesse. "In the last few days of crisis, this corporation has lived up to the guiding principles of its founder." He nodded toward the Old Man. The Old Man smiled and nodded in return.

"Courage, strength, conviction," Jones said in neo-biblical tones. "Well, if I have anything to say about it and, ha-ha-ha-ha, rumor has it I might, we will continue to meet each new challenge with the same

aggressive attitude that has governed this corporation over the years. We will adhere to the credo of . . . SHIT."

The double doors to the room splintered inward. RoboCop marched into the room. The executives gasped, terrified at the sight of this rogue product. One man grabbed for a phone.

"Please," Robo cautioned. "Don't."

The man pulled back his hand.

Only the Old Man seemed to maintain his composure. "How may we help you, Officer?" he asked.

Robo considered this. The four prime directives flashed through his mind. **DIRECTIVE ONE: SERVE THE PUBLIC TRUST. DIRECTIVE TWO: UPHOLD THE LAW. DIRECTIVE THREE: PROTECT THE INNOCENT. DIRECTIVE FOUR: [CLASSIFIED].**

The fourth directive began to flash. Robo concentrated and willed them away. He didn't need the directives right now.

He was a cop.

A good cop.

He bowed slightly before standing at attention before the Old Man. "Dick Jones is under suspicion of murder, conspiracy, and aiding and abetting a known felon."

The Old Man didn't react. "Unfortunately," Robo continued, "my program does not allow me to act against an officer of this company."

Jones spun toward the Old Man. "This is absurd. Preposterous! This man is a violent mechanical psychopath wanted by the police."

The Old Man ignored Jones and, standing, looked Robo directly in the eye. "These are serious charges. Do you have evidence?"

"Yes, sir." Robo walked to the center of the boardroom table. Making a fist, he extended the terminal strip from his knuckles and shoved it into a computer access port on the table. The overhead video monitors in the boardroom crackled to life. The figure of Dick Jones, glaring down at the camera's eye, smiled stonily. "I had to kill Bob Morton because he made a mistake . . . you. Now it's time to erase the mistake."

The executives in the room uttered a collective gasp. Jones stared at the faces around him. He gaped at the Old Man. The Old Man's eyes were hard and flinty.

At that point, two OmniCon security guards burst into the room, guns drawn. "Hold it, Robo," one of them yelled.

"No!" the Old Man yelled.

It was too late. The two guards charged Robo. The cyborg tried to be gentle but firm. He tapped one of them in the stomach with his mighty fist, effectively knocking the wind out of him. He tossed the

other one along the top of the boardroom table. Both men dropped their guns during their gymnastics.

Jones saw his chance and took it. He dove for a gun, palmed it and came up firing. The board members dove under their table. Only the Old Man remained standing firm, looking at Jones with distaste.

Jones fired again and again at Robo. The bullets pinged harmlessly off his chest. Robo sighed. “Aww, come on, Dick.”

Jones stopped firing. He was not on a roll here. Thinking quickly, he grabbed the Old Man and pushed the executive before him as a shield. Jones placed the barrel of the gun next to the Old Man’s forehead.

“Okay, tin man. I want a chopper . . . now. We will calmly go to the roof. I will board the chopper with my hostage. Anyone tries to stop me . . . the Old Man gets it.”

The Old Man stood there, simmering. “Dick?”

“What?”

“You’re fired.”

Robo stared at Jones. He summoned up the prime directives. Only the first three flashed through his mind. The Old Man chose that second to stomp his heel into Jones’s instep. The elderly executive elbowed his former executive hard in the gut. Jones gasped as the Old Man leaped away.

Robo smiled at Jones. Jones was fired. He was no longer an employee of the company. So much for the fourth directive.

Jones aimed his gun at the retreating Old Man. Robo blinked, lapsed into Targeting Mode and, pulling his Auto-9, squeezed off four quick shots.

The first two shots took Jones by surprise, knocking him spinning toward the large window stretching the length of the table. The third shot shattered the glass. The fourth shot hit Jones smack in the chest, sending him hurtling through the massive window.

A howling wind sliced through the boardroom as Jones, howling almost as loud, glided 151 stories to the ground.

Robo gave his Auto-9 a western spin and slid it back into his holster. He nodded toward the Old Man, turned, and walked for the exit.

The Old Man rushed forward, placing a hand on Robo’s elbow. Robo turned. The Old Man was smiling. “You’re a credit to the force, young man. That was marvelous shooting. What’s your name?”

Robo thought for a moment. “Murphy,” he said and walked out of the room.

[27]

On the outskirts of town, an elderly couple, Emma and Hank Saunders, sat in their small home, watching the latest news on television. Casey Wong was smiling into the camera, as usual, intoning, "Detroit got its police force back today. In a surprising turn of events, OmniCon agreed to every key demand made by the striking police union. In a night of widespread looting and lawlessness, there were moments of heroism. Justin Ballard-Watkins has more on this story at Henry Ford Memorial Hospital."

A young man in a loud suit jockeyed for position with a gaggle of other reporters in a hospital room. Behind them, Mayor Waldo Gibson was smiling and shaking hands with a bedridden Anne Lewis. Lewis smiled weakly as the reporter offered, "Officer Anne Lewis. Even while on strike she risked her life to uphold the law. Broken bones. Shot three times. What a gal. What a cop. She's an inspiration to us all. Back to you, Casey."

The camera focused on both Casey Wong and perky Jess Perkins. They faced each other before final sign-off. "I don't know about you, Jess." Casey grinned. "But I'll sleep a little better tonight."

"Thanks for watching MediaBreak." Jess grinned. "And next time you see a cop . . . smile."

Emma shut off the television and walked to the window. "Is he still out there?"

"Uh-huh," Emma answered. "Still just sitting there. On the hill."

"Well," her husband said. "Let's leave him be. I feel kinda safer knowing that he's way out here on patrol."

Emma nodded and turned out the living room light.

Outside the house, far off in the distance, a policeman sat high on a hillside, a large dog at his side. Stars twinkled high above him in the late night sky. He gazed at the moon suspended in space.

Someday, perhaps, the machine and the man in him would merge. Some day he might be at peace with himself. For now, however, he was in turmoil. He had no home. There was no other being on the entire planet he could share his feelings, his thoughts with. He was one of a kind.

The dog next to him stirred. He extended a powerful steel hand and patted the dog gently on its head. The dog snuggled up to Robo's leg and wagged his tail.

Robo continued to stroke the dog's ears. Maybe some day he would feel whole. Maybe someday he would feel less a freak. Maybe someday he could call himself a *man.*

He gazed at the moon and remembered his family. He saw Jan's loving eyes. Jimmy's smiling face.

Maybe someday . . .

A single tear dribbled out of his human eye and cascaded down his flesh-and-steel cheek.

Abruptly, he stood and faced the lights of the city far off in the distance.

Somewhere, there was a crime happening.

He whistled to the dog and the two of them made their way down the hill toward the awaiting TurboCruiser.

Today, tonight, he was a cop.

A cop with a job to do.

He revved the engines of the Cruiser up and headed back for Detroit, leaving the moon far behind.

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